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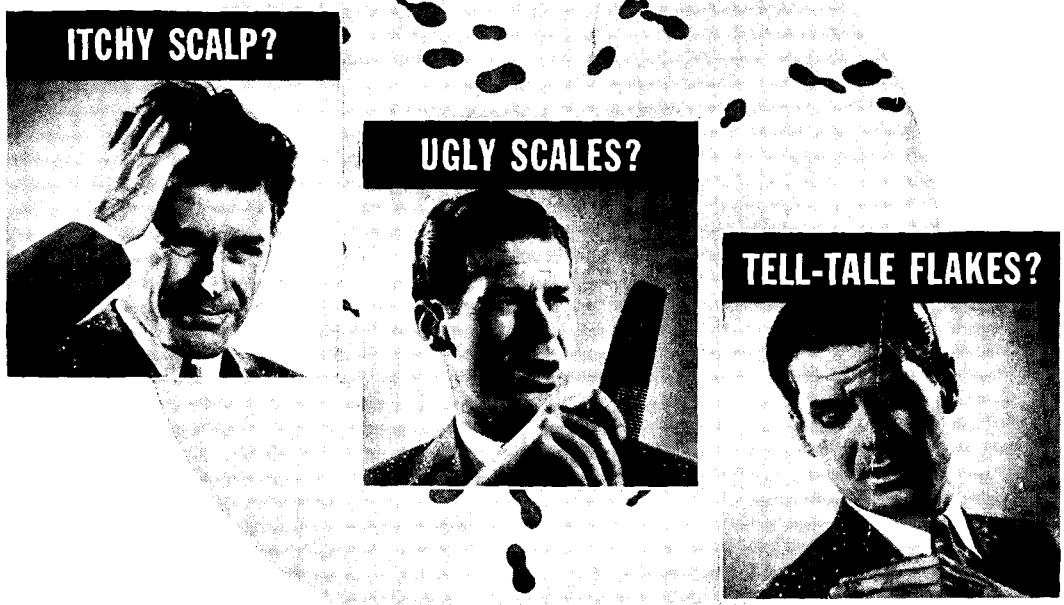
PITYROSPORUM OVALE, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" regarded by many authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.



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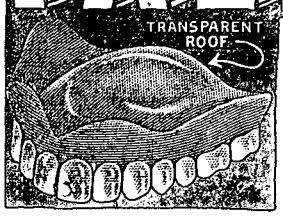

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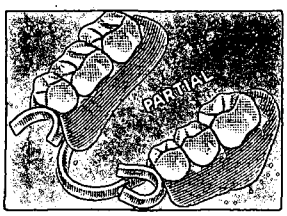

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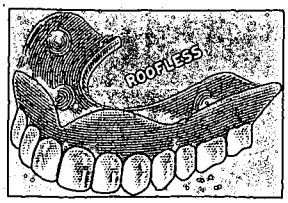

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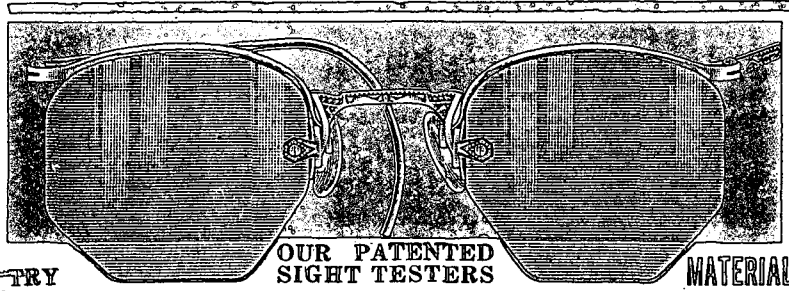

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Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

Contents for August, 1942

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from **The Daughter of Thor.** Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting **Vulcan—God of Heavy Industry.** Illustrations by Bill Rand; Robert Fuqua; Bill Brady; Ned Hadley; Malcolm Smith; Rod Ruth; Ed Gordon; Robert Gibson Jones

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AUGUST, 1942

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3

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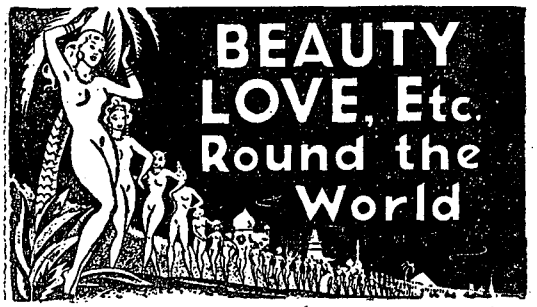

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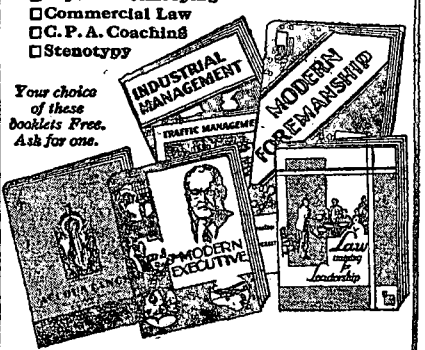

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ROBERT GIBSON JONES—that's the name. You'll want to know it anyway, so we'll tell you right off. Yes, you guessed it, he's the guy who painted that swell cover this month. How do you like him? We, the editors and the art director, feel happy enough about this cover to brag about it—and you'll forgive us.

The cover is the author's idea, and was painted first (as are most of our covers). Then a photostat was sent to author Edmond Hamilton, who has been an ace fantasy writer for a good many years, and today, unlike many of the old-timers, has managed to stay ahead of the young-bloods, and rank among the top writers of the land. We also sent him a title, and with our faith in his ability, plated the cover.

When "The Daughter Of Thor" came in, we were justified in that faith. This story is, we feel, one of the finest modern fantasy yarns penned since the world war number two began. We feel that it portrays, too, the spirit of Norway that is now ground under the iron heel of the Nazi, but nevertheless surges stronger than ever in that mountainous land.

We must congratulate these two men on a very fine job!

WHILE on the subject of covers, we call attention to the second of our "Gods Of Olympus" series, on the back cover, painted by the old master Frank R. Paul. This one's Vulcan, the god of heavy industry, and it's a very fine portrayal of it, you'll agree.

TWO Wisconsin writers appear together in this issue, which isn't so odd, except that these two are very good friends, and each of them will get a kick out of seeing their names on the same contents page. They are Robert Bloch, with another of his increasingly popular Lefty Feep stories, and August W. Derleth, famous novelist of Sauk City, with a weirdy about an imp named Ze-bub. Perhaps the oddest fact here, is the sharp contrast between the slapstick of Bloch, and the slick of Derleth. We know you'll enjoy these excellent examples of both types of fantasy. Each one is fine literature in its particular field.

PERHAPS the best loved characters of this magazine are those interesting little lepricbauns, Tink, Jing, and Nastee. William P. McGivern ties them up with our armed forces in Ireland this time, and the little Irish fairies really stir up a mess of trouble, tears, happiness, and *story!* Don't miss this one. It'll eat at your heartstrings.

IF you like 'em fantastic (literally!) then Thornton Ayre has his finger on your doorbell. His "The Mental Gangster" had the chills crawling up and down our spine, and no foolin'!

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL is the English counterpart of August W. Derleth. His story in this issue fascinated us for sheer polish on socko power. That yarn "satisfies", it's so smooth and complete and slick. A fine fantasy, you'll agree.

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN and Robert Moore Williams engaged in a duel in this issue, both having long stories which have your editor guessing as to which will win the nod as "best" from you readers. Confidentially, if you can definitely pick one or the other, you are sticking your neck out further than we are willing to!

WE were glancing back at our Notebook for May, and we find that several more of our predictions have come true, regarding the war. We'll just indulge in a little reminiscing, and mention them. Tokyo, of course, was bombed by American airmen, and you know who. Hats off to Jimmy Doolittle, who must read *Fantastic Adventures!* His stunt was as fantastic as they come!

American airmen, we said, would sink a disastrous portion of the Jap navy. We think you'll find that portion of the Jap navy on the bottom of the Coral Sea.

JUST for the other side of the ledger, Hitler's spring offensive into Russia did *not* gain great speed. And if you think we're not glad to be wrong, you're wrong!

INCIDENTALLY, we just took a trip in our time machine last night, and we saw the future, only six months from now. But we can't breathe a word of it, because it's so sensational, and obviously such a secret, that to reveal it would certainly not be cricket—inasmuch as the Japs and Germans probably believe we *do* have a time-machine by now, and read us every month to find out what's going to happen to 'em next. All we can say is "*plenty!*"

(Continued on page 8)

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 6)

RECENTLY we heard from Eando Binder, and the news is glad. He's giving up the business of writing comics, and going back into fiction. Which means plenty to you fans who have been wondering where he was. We've just bought a novel from him, and we'll have plenty of new stuff coming in. It was a job to wheedle him back into the fold, but by golly, no good authors are going to desert us and get away with it! How about it, readers?

SPEAKING of novels, we also bought one from Nelson S. Bond. Yes, we heard your exclamation of pleasure. Watch for announcement regarding its appearance soon. It'll be an event!

Incidentally, we sent him Robert Fuqua's illustrations for all of his previous novels, and he has them all on his study wall. We feel that these two are building up a sort of co-operative friendship that may last for many years. In fact, we've come to associate them so much that we automatically give Fuqua all Bond stories to illustrate.

THE other day we ran across a queer little chap—a mild, peace-loving fellow who lives alone and likes it, and wants to be left that way. At the moment he was shedding bitter tears, because some bully had beaten him up. Ordinarily this arouses sympathy in us, but when we saw his tears, we found curiosity overcoming pity—because they were red as blood! Yessir, Mr. Phrynosome (that's his name, scientists tell us) was crying "bloody" tears. If you're interested in the fantastic fact, he's a little lizard who inhabits the deserts of the west, and when he gets excited, or teased, cries blood. Blood rushes to its small head and its eyelids swell to double and often triple their normal size, causing what might be termed a hemorrhage. A thin bloody stream is emitted from the upper eyelids, and hence, tears of blood.

"Oh stop! You octopi are all alike!"

SOMETIMES ordinary everyday words have a fantastic story behind their origin. Take for instance the word "psychology." It comes from the Greek, and it means "science of the breath." That's because they associated it with living. They believed the soul of a dying man left the body with the last breath; thus the soul and the body were linked together.

In later years, when the soul came to have a religious meaning, psychology was referred to as the science of the mind. After that it became known as the science of consciousness. Today it is known as the science of behavior.

Dr. Samuel W. Fernberger, in his book "Elementary General Psychology," cites the following humorous quotation:

"Psychologists first lost their breath, then they lost their soul, then their mind, and now, with the developing interest in reactions, they are rapidly losing their consciousness."

THE grapevine recently brought in a very peculiar emergency call indeed. It seems that Dr. Rosslyn Bruce, the rector of Hurstmonceux, Sussex, England, wants a green mouse!

Exactly what he wants with a green mouse is not known; but he's mighty busy these days perfecting a breed of thoroughbred, Irish-colored rodents.

It took Dr. Bruce thirty generations of mousing before he succeeded in producing his first green mouse. This one was grass-green, and its first baby mouse turned out to be beer-bottle green. Lately Dr. Bruce proudly displayed the first family from the bottle-green mouse. Two of the family are white, the others lean a little on the grass-green side.

"It is obvious to me that I must get more yellow and blue into my strain to improve the green," observes the good rector, "so I shall have to introduce further crosses."

So if you have any green mice in your pantry, let Dr. Bruce have 'em.

Maybe he's breeding a special camouflaged mouse for jungle sabotage, in which event, it's all part of the defense effort.

BELIEVE it or . . . but there are human beings who *never* drink water. The great majority of the Chinese people never drink water. The ancient Chinese custom of drinking great quantities of tea which persists to the present day is not, as

(Continued on page 62)

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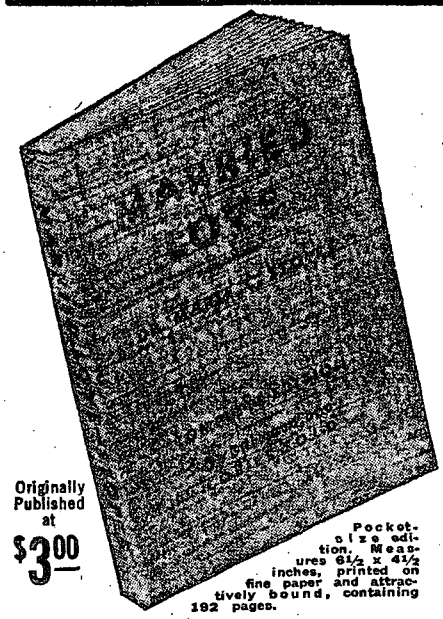

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With the coming of the Nazi invaders, war came once again to the gods; who loved to fight. But how could they know which was the right side? Should they fight Nazis?

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The DAUGHTER OF THOR

by EDMOND HAMILTON

FROM far in the north, colossal banners of cold radiance streamed up across the brooding night sky. They pulsated in a shifting glory of red and green, waving stronger and reaching higher toward the zenith. Beneath that weird, quivering glow of the Northern Lights, the snow-clad mountains were like cowled white giants guarding the black reaches of Narvik Fjord.

Mart Fallon watched from the barred window of his dark prison. His lean, tired faced, haggard and unshaven, showed deep lines of fatigue in the shifting glow. His black eyes were dull and somber, and his shoulders sagged inside his torn RAF uniform jacket. He was feeling a bitterness of despair that was not his alone in these first fateful weeks of the Nazi invasion of Norway.

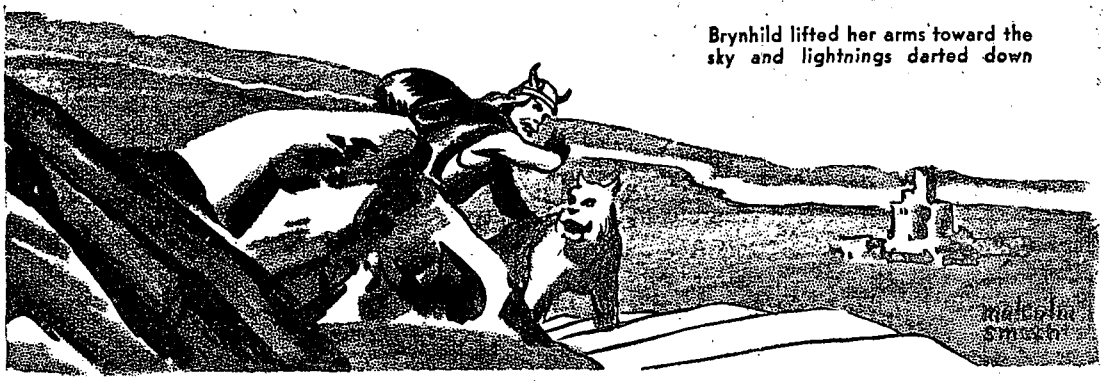
The heavy, rumbling voice of his fellow-prisoner came out of the darkness behind him.

"There will be battle and death tonight," Helverson muttered. "When those lights flame in the sky, the Valkyries are riding."

Fallon turned to peer at the other. "What are you talking about, Nels?"

He spoke, a little haltingly, in the Norwegian that his fellow-prisoner had taught him during the weary time of their confinement.

Nels Helverson had risen to his feet. More clearly even than Fallon, he showed the effects of terrible ordeal. A Norwegian soldier of giant frame, beneath his shock of yellow hair his massive face was gaunt, his blue eyes wild and burning.



Brynhild lifted her arms toward the sky and lightnings darted down

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"The Valkyries," Helverson repeated, staring out fixedly at the unearthly flare of light. "The warrior-maids, the messengers of Odin, who bear those slain in battle to Valhalla."

Fallon looked at him a little uneasily. "You surely don't believe those old superstitions."

"They are not superstitions," rumbled the Norwegian gutturally. "The old hero-gods of my people still live! They will come to our aid—Odin the one-eyed, Thor of the lightnings, and all the others. They will sweep these treacherous invaders into the sea."

Helverson's eyes were blazing, his gaunt face wild with passion. He towered huge in the quivering glow of the shifting rays outside.

The young American pilot felt deepened dismay. His big fellow-prisoner had been increasingly strange and moody of late. Dazed by the hammer-shocks of sudden invasion, exhausting battle and disastrous defeat, Helverson's half-crazed mind was turning now to the ancient beliefs of his race.

It was not to be wondered at. All Norway was dazed and reeling. Without warning the Nazis had struck, sweeping in from the sea and in a single night seizing nearly a thousand miles of coastline from Oslo to this far northern port of Narvik. Their tanks, planes and guns had shattered the bewildered defenders, and now the invaders were ruthlessly and rapidly marching up the valleys to complete their conquest.

Britain had been equally unprepared for the audacious Nazi stroke, but had rallied to counter it. Big patrol bombers of the Royal Air Force had roared northward to reconnoiter the invaded Norwegian ports and ascertain at which ones an Allied counter-invasion could best succeed. Mart Fallon, American volunteer pilot, had flown one of those bombers to this Nazi-held port of Narvik, far north of the Arctic Circle.

HE had not flown it back. He had been shot down over Narvik Fjord, and ever since had been caged in this improvised prison which the Nazis had established on the heights above the town. And here, for day after day, he had been mercilessly questioned about British preparations by Victor Heysing, the wolf-like young Gestapo officer in charge.

"I know how you feel, Nels," he told the Norwegian. "Heysing's prodding has nearly driven me crazy myself. But don't let it get you."

Helverson's bull neck corded, and his eyes were fanatic as he glared out at the witchery of the Northern Lights above the snows.

"Comes soon the time when the old gods rise against these spawn of Hell," he muttered. "The sword of Odin and the lightnings of Thor will blast them."

He pointed a quivering hand at the shifting rays. "Already the sign is in the sky! The Aesir are awake, and shield-maidens ride this night! Blood and vengeance are near!"

Fallon saw the madness in the giant Norseman's flaming eyes. The ancient faith of a race had awakened to life in him. The young American groaned inwardly. This monomania of his friend was almost the last straw.

"Nels, get a grip on yourself and forget those myths," he begged. "The Northern Lights aren't any omen. They're nothing but—"

Boom—*crash!* Like a burst of sudden thunder, the nearby sound struck Fallon silent. It was followed by more thunderous reverberations.

"By Heaven, that's guns!" the American yelled. "Big guns, too! "It's from down in the fjord!"

He ran to the window. But it faced

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away from the fjord. He could see nothing but the eerie light upon the snow outside, and the stockade of barbed wire that enclosed this make-shift warehouse-prison.

Nazi soldiers were running out there, dark figures against the snow. The thudding of guns from the west was rising to a crescendo. A siren began its warning scream at the Nazi airfield near the prison.

"Those are British ships that are shelling the town!" Fallon yelled excitedly. "Twelve-inchers, too! There must be a battleship in the squadron!".

He and Helverson, pressing against the barred window, saw searchlights stab into the heavens from the nearby airfield. Anti-aircraft guns coughed frantically out there, at planes swooping from overhead.

Then came a sound of a gigantic door slamming, and a great gout of red flame exploded at the edge of the air-drome. Another British bomb exploded two seconds later, much nearer the prison. Fallon, from his experience as bomber-pilot, knew the third bomb of the stick was coming.

"Down, Nels!" he yelled, throwing himself and the big Norwegian to the floor.

As they hit the cement, the whole world seemed to go up in the explosion of the third bomb. The floor heaved and rocked under them, there was a shattering crash of falling masonry, a clang of iron on stone.

Wounded Nazis were yelling thinly somewhere nearby, when Fallon dragged himself groggily back to his feet. The stone outer wall of their cell was cracked above and below the barred window. The bomb had evidently hit one end of the prison, or near it.

Nazi fighter-planes were roaring up from the neighboring field, into the swinging sweep of the Northern Lights. Machine-guns stuttered up there in the sky, hardly audible over the thunder of the distant shelling.

"Did I not say that blood and vengeance were near?" shouted Helverson. "The sign in the sky was true!"

Fallon was scrabbling with sudden furious hope at the bars of the window. The bomb-blast had blown in the glass, and the split of the stone wall had wrenched half the bars loose in their sockets.

"Nels, help me! If we can get out of here before Heysing and his devils get over their surprise—"

HELVERSON'S fanatic excitement did not prevent him from grasping immediately the opportunity of escape. The giant Norwegian brushed Fallon aside, and exerted his great strength to bend the loosened bars. His hunched back cracked audibly—but the bars gave inward.

In a second, Fallon and he were outside the window. They crouched a moment in the shadow of the wall, knee-deep in snow and shivering to the icy wind. They could see now that the whole western end of the long, low stone building had been smashed in.

Beyond it, they glimpsed the battle going on down in the fjord. The darkness down there was constantly torn by red gun-flashes. By that uncertain illumination, Fallon glimpsed a British battleship and a half-dozen destroyers pouring shells into moored Nazi destroyers and into the Nazi batteries that were fiercely answering from the town.

The British planes were now swooping down to spot and bomb those batteries, hampered by a savage swarm of Messerschmitts. The battle was nerve-chilling in this uncanny setting of snowy peaks and dark sea lit by the

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flaring Northern Lights.

Fallon perceived that a section of the stockade had been levelled by the bomb. He dragged Helverson with him through the snow, in a run.

"Can we reach the British ships?" gasped the Norwegian as they ran.

"No chance of that," Fallon panted. "This is just a raid, not a landing-party, for there's no transports. But that airfield is near, and if we can get our hands on a Nazi plane—"

A rifle *blam-blammed* behind them and a hoarse German voice shouted the alarm. The prison-guards, recovering from the demoralization caused by the bomb-hit, had sighted the two fugitives.

Fallon and Helverson flung themselves behind a snowy hillock as more rifles went off. As they stumbled on through the hip-high snow, the American heard Victor Heysing's clear voice blaring orders.

He judged from the sound of voices that the Nazi guards were making for the fjord, assuming that the escaped men would try to reach the British ships still shelling the town. Fallon breathed a prayer of thanks for that, as he and the Norwegian pitched on toward the airfield.

There were only three or four Nazi planes left on the snowy field, he saw when they reached its edge. But they were in luck, for one of those planes was near them. It was a Messerschmitt whose pilot was hastily hammering and cursing at something in the cockpit. The motor idled.

"I'll take him," Helverson rumbled as they crept out across the field, keeping that nearest plane between them and the Nazis farther away.

The Norwegian's great hands reached in and clamped the neck of the Nazi pilot, before he knew they were behind him. In terrible silence, Helverson drew the squirming man out of the ship. There was a dull cracking sound. The Nazi's choking utterances ceased, and Helverson dropped him.

"There's one of Hel's children who will blast no more of our villages!" flamed the giant.

Fallon had scrambled into the cockpit. "Quick, Nels—squeeze in here! Unless we—"

The clean crack of a pistol punctuated his words, and Helverson staggered with blood suddenly spouting from his shoulder.

THE American turned, and saw a single man racing from the direction they themselves had come, his pistol raised for another shot. In the eery rays that painted sky and snow, there was no mistaking that slender, black-uniformed figure, that blond, wolf-handsome face.

Victor Heysing had not made the same mistake as the Nazi prison-guards who had taken it for granted they would head for the fjord. The Gestapo officer had trailed them through the snow.

Helverson's right arm hung useless. With a frantic movement, Fallon tugged the staggering Norwegian into the cockpit, jamming the narrow space. A second bullet from Heysing's pistol slammed into the thin armor around the pilot's seat, as Fallon gunned the idling motor.

The Messerschmitt roared down the field and took off so heavily that it barely cleared the hillocks beyond. Almost instantly, Fallon found himself flying out over the deep fjord. Down there the battle was drawing to a close. The British warships, their guns still thundering, were steaming out to sea. Two Nazi destroyers and a half-dozen transports had been reduced to flaming wreckage.

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Fallon banked around and headed northward, into the full flare of the Northern Lights. Fighting for altitude, he won over the nearby snowy peaks and laid a course slightly east of north.

"We can't make Scotland in this fighter—not half enough fuel," he jerked over his shoulder to Helverson. "And even if the Allies have counter-invaded in the south, we can't reach those ports either. We'll have to make for the fishing villages on the far northern coast, that are still in Norwegian hands."

Helverson, holding his hand over his wounded shoulder, nodded his great head. His blue eyes still held that fanatic glare.

"We go toward Odin's land—the north. That is well!"

Fallon glanced around worriedly at his half-crazed comrade. He stiffened as he glimpsed a black speck far behind them in the aurora sky.

"That's a Nazi fighter following us!" he cried. "That devil Heysing! He didn't have time to get word to other pilots to follow us. He must be in that plane himself!"

Fallon knew the young Gestapo officer was a pilot—Heysing's technical questions during that long torment of inquisition had shown that. And he knew that Heysing thought he possessed valuable information, and was determined at any risk to prevent their escape.

The relentless singlemindedness of the Nazi in his pursuit woke new rage in Fallon. Remembering those days when Heysing had bullied, slapped and hectored him for hours on end, Fallon was tempted to turn back and meet his pursuer in combat.

But he knew that his chances in such a fight would be slim, for his overloaded plane could not maneuver to match the other. And it was his duty to make good his escape to those far Arctic coastal villages beyond the northern wilderness, for from them he could reach England with information on Narvik's defenses that would be vital to the Allied cause.

HE opened the throttle to the limit. But the plane behind crept closer. At a roaring pace of miles a minute, pursued and pursuer rushed above the vast, almost uninhabited wilderness that is north Norway.

Fallon saw it as a forbidding vista of towering, jagged white mountains and somber shadowed valleys, and great glaciers creeping like glittering serpents toward the distant sea. Nowhere was there a light of house or village. Not even the wild Lapps who herded their reindeer on the barren plains far eastward would come into this lifeless, icy land.

And over snow-clad peak and glacier shot and shimmered the stupendous brilliance of the Northern Lights. The whole sky ahead was a palisade of luminous splendor, from which the wheeling rays stabbed south across the frosty heavens. He had never seen such an aurora.

Helverson made an archaic gesture of reverence toward that blazing sky, his eyes burning.

"The old gods have awakened this night! And we go toward them."

Fallon could not find utterance for disbelief, this time. He felt hypnotized by the aurora. Its fierce rays were still growing in intensity. It was as though they were flying into the sun.

Tingling forces seemed thrilling through his exhausted body. He felt somehow on the edge of tremendous revelation that made him forget the relentless pursuer behind. Like the fanatic Norseman, he too was feeling a

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strange, wild eagerness of superhuman expectation as they flew on.

CHAPTER II

The Valkyries

BRUTAL interruption drove all uncanny feelings from Fallon's mind. Machine-guns yammered behind him, and a stream of tracer screamed past the left wing of his plane.

Instant awareness that Heysing had overtaken them tripped the trained reflexes in the American pilot's brain. Without a second for thought, he slammed over the stick and kicked the rudder to bank sharply around. He caught just a glimpse of Heysing's plane, leaping around after him with relentless swiftness.

"The Nazi devil!" he thought ragingly. "He'd follow us to hell rather than see us escape."

Helverson was bellowing in stark fury. But Fallon's mind became ice-cold and clear as he tensely maneuvered for position.

He knew this battle was to the death. His overloaded plane could not escape Heysing. One or the other of them had to go down. The Nazi's lighter ship had superior maneuverability. But Fallon was hoping that the Gestapo officer might be rusty as a combat pilot.

Like two circling hawks, they clawed for position in the supernatural splendor of that incredible aurora. Down below, the howling wilderness of snowy ranges and creeping glaciers sheened in the wheeling rays. They must be far, far north, Fallon thought fleetingly, far up over the wild, unvisited Finmark mountains and near the Arctic Ocean coast and its few fishing villages. If he could down Heysing, they could—

No time to think of the future now! There wouldn't *be* any future if he let Heysing get on his tail as the Nazi had now almost succeeded in doing. Fallon gunned his heavy ship into a bewildering corkscrew, screamed steeply upward until his plane was almost hanging on its prop, and then looped back and down and found himself roaring a hundred yards behind the baffled Nazi.

In a split-second he had Heysing's plane in his sights, silhouetted blackly against the tremendous aurora. His finger savagely triggered. But there came no answering roar from the machine-guns of his ship. The fire-control of this Messerschmitt was jammed and dead.

Appalled, Fallon suddenly remembered the Nazi pilot of this plane had been hammering and cursing in the cockpit when they seized it. He knew now why that pilot hadn't been up in the fight over the fjord. But the knowledge came too late.

"No guns, Nels!" he shouted to Helverson. "We can't fight, and I don't think we can get away."

Heysing had already discovered their presence behind him and had banked startledly away. But now the Nazi came rushing back in from a rear quarter, with all guns spitting.

"He cannot kill us," Helverson's great voice was booming with fanatic confidence. "The old gods fight with us tonight."

FALLON had no such confidence, and his heart was cold with foreknowledge of doom as he flung the plane all over the sky to escape the Nazi. Seeming to sense their helplessness, Heysing was boring in recklessly at every opportunity, flinging bursts at them from every possible range.

Up into the mad dance of dazzling

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rays in the aurora-painted heavens they thundered, and down again toward the wild, snowy peaks and valleys. It was only a question of time, Fallon knew. But the time ran out even sooner than he had expected.

A gust of rising wind smacked him as he zoomed steeply. As he fought frantically to avoid stalling, Heysing swooped from above. The Nazi's machine-guns flung a whiplash of lead that tore across Fallon's motor. His engine choked, coughed and died. His instruments showed him that at least two oil-lines were gone.

"Got us!" Fallon cried, his raging shout loud now that the motor was dead. "Hang on, Nels—we're going down."

A dead-stick landing down in the snowy mountains below was a hundred-to-one chance, he knew. But it was the only chance left.

Rising winds screamed past his wings and buffeted the crippled ship as he rushed down through the twitching auroral glare. Heysing came down over them and loosed another burst that tore through their fuselage. Fallon knew bitterness at not being able to take the Nazi with him.

He was aiming for a long, snowy gorge walled by marching ridges of icy peaks. Keeping the nose of the plane as far up as he dared, he craned tensely to estimate distances in the unreal illumination. Now the wind was a whistling shriek, and the floor of the gorge was slamming up toward him with appalling speed.

Fallon felt the wheels hit the snow and the frozen ground close beneath it. The plane, traveling at express-train speed, bounced crazily back up from the floor of the gorge. Then it smacked down again, hit deeper snow, and heeled over on its nose with a crash that stunned him.

He did not know exactly how long he had been unconscious, when he awoke. Dazedly, he felt around and found Helverson still unconscious. He squirmed weakly until he got the door of the jammed cockpit open. Then he hauled the senseless Norwegian out with him into the snow.

Freezing winds hit him in the face, blowing up the gorge from the west with increasing violence. To north and south rose sheer, icy cliffs. The sky above still flamed awesomely with that supernatural splendor of Northern Lights.

"Nels, wake up!" he cried hoarsely, slapping the unconscious giant's face. He could see now that Helverson had lost much blood.

The Norwegian stirred weakly, opened dazed blue eyes. He seemed not to see Fallon bending above him.

"Listen, they come!" he exclaimed huskily. "I hear them above the wind, riding toward us."

His eyes flared in exaltation. "The Valkyries come! We are dead and the messengers of Odin ride to bear us to Valhalla!"

SO WILD and eery their surroundings, that the staggering Fallon himself seemed to hear thunder of rushing hoofbeats and a stabbing of silver-clear cries above the screeching wind.

Snow suddenly kicked up a yard from the American, and a shot rang through the uproar of tempest. He whirled, and stared unbelievingly.

Victor Heysing was coming up the gorge toward them, his black figure clear against the aurora-lit snow. The Nazi triggered his pistol again and the slug whistled past Fallon and hit the Norwegian's lower arm.

Fallon could have admired the Nazi's relentless devotion to duty, at another

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time. It was clear that Heysing had watched their plane land, had seen that they could have escaped injury, and had himself landed down the gorge and come on foot to finish them while they lay unconscious.

Blind rage at the merciless pursuit exploded in Mart Fallon's brain. He flung himself with a crazy access of strength toward the other.

Heysing's gun kicked twice and searing flame grazed the American's temple. He was upon the Nazi before he could trigger again. He tore at the man's gun, his other fists weakly smashing at Heysing's face.

"You weak fool!" snarled the Nazi, contemptuous of the strengthless blows as he sought to free his gun-hand.

Heysing's blond, devilishly handsome young face had not a trace of apprehension in it. The superbly muscled officer had a wolf's tough strength, and Fallon knew that he himself was going fast.

That knowledge, and the red sting of hate, convulsed his body for a final effort. He jabbed both hands savagely into Heysing's chin. As the Nazi struggled to keep his balance, Fallon snatched fiercely at the gun.

He got it. But before he could use it, Heysing was charging back in at him with a snarl of fury. His cap had been knocked off and his blond hair and contorted, handsome face were clear in the spectral brilliance. Fallon's arms felt like lead as he struck clumsily with the clubbed gun.

The weapon rang on the Nazi's head, and he pitched into the snow. Fallon turned back toward the Norwegian, and as he did so, fell forward on hands and knees. He knew consciousness was running out of him but he crawled blindly forward through the snow.

But why, above the shriek and whistle of the winds, did he still seem to hear the thunder of nearing hoofbeats and the squalling cry of a hunting beast? Why did the unearthly flare of the aurora seem waxing in brilliance all along the gorge?

Helverson was on his knees in the snow, his massive face flaming wildly as he pointed back down the gorge.

"The Valkyr-maidens!" he was shouting in a hoarse cry against the wind. "They come!"

Fallon tried to turn to look behind him, but everything seemed spinning around him now. His brain refused to credit what his eyes saw.

Rushing up the gorge was thundering a wild troop of riders. They *were* Valkyries, warrior-maids of ancient legend, mailed and armed and with their pale gold hair flowing from beneath their winged helmets. Their silver cry streamed out on the shrieking wind.

"Yo to ho! Yo to ho!"

The messengers of Odin, the choosers of the slain, riding fast toward him through night and wind and flaming Northern Lights!

FALLON knew it was delirium as those incredible riders rushed upon him. In their lead, upon a black stallion, rode a mailed girl who wore no helmet and whose gold hair streamed back in the wind like flame. And by her knee, like a hunting dog, loped a huge white lynx.

This Valkyr-leader had seen the little group—the prostrate Nazi, the raving Norwegian, the drunkenly swaying American. Her voice pealed in a cry of command as she drew rein beside Fallon.

An incredibly beautiful white face looked down through the dark mists that were closing over Fallon's mind. It was a face fearless and dynamic, whose most wonderful feature was the

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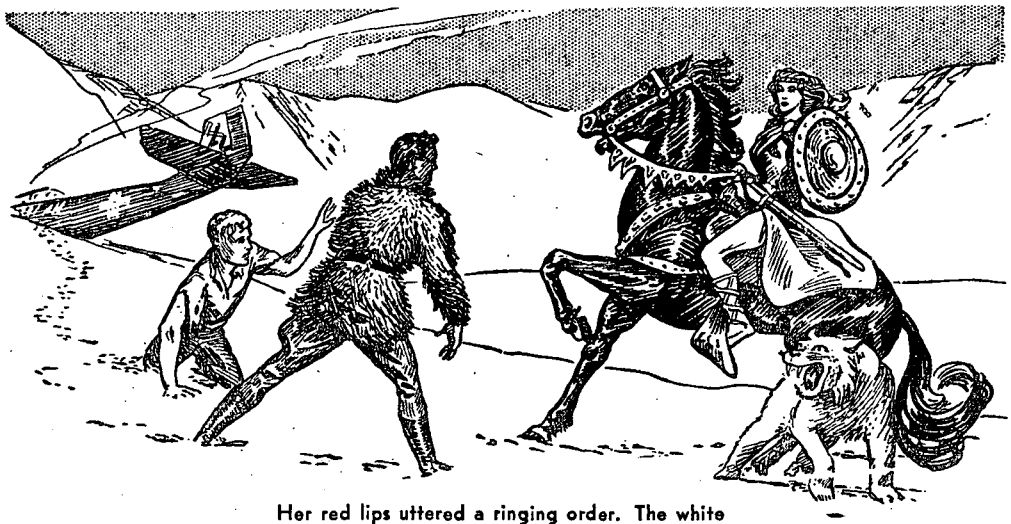

Her red lips uttered a ringing order. The white lynx padding toward Fallon snarled and stopped

stormy blue eyes in which little lightnings seemed to flash.

Her red lips uttered a ringing order. The white lynx padding toward Fallon snarled and stopped. A Valkyr-maid spurred to the senseless Heysing and stooped low and pulled him across her saddle-bow. Another took the Norwegian in similar fashion. And Fallon felt the unbelievably strong arm of a third girl hook his shoulder and pull him onto her horse.

The unhelmed girl leader shouted another command and spurred forward. And the whole troop galloped on up the snowy gorge, with the wind at their backs and their silver cry pealing in the Northern Lights.

"Yo to ho!"

Fallon knew that all this must be the delirium before death, yet he struggled to remain conscious as he jounced on the galloping steed.

He could dimly hear Helverson's voice raving near him. "I told you the old gods lived! We are dead, and they bear us to Valhalla!"

Fallon's darkening mind wondered if the Norseman could be right. He might, indeed, be dead for his body seemed now to have lost almost all sensation.

He opened his eyes for a last time. They had galloped up the gorge to a narrow, snowy pass. Beyond its crest lay a great valley cupped by towering, icy peaks.

But he could not see down into that valley. Was it his dimming vision or was it magic that made the whole valley seem an unseeable blind spot? His sight seemed to curve *around* it. The entrance to it was an uncanny blank in his vision.

Yet the girl leader was riding fearlessly forward, and the other Valkyries followed. Fallon felt a sudden sharp, wrenching shock as though he had fallen from a great height. He was now inside the blind-spot valley.

And now, he could see its interior. It stretched miles away, a dim vista of forests and fields and stone castles, toward a distant sheer cliff against which bulked the frowning mass of the biggest stone citadel.

He could no longer sustain consciousness. As he sank into darkness, his last sensation was hearing Helverson's mad, exultant cry.

"Valhalla! Valhalla!"

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CHAPTER III

Daughter of the Gods

FALLON woke from heavy sleep, with a feeling of extraordinary lightness and well-being. He looked around bewilderedly. He was lying upon a bed made of hides stretched on a massive wooden frame whose four posts were carved into wolfsheads. It occupied a corner of a dusky stone room that had no other furniture except some hide chairs.

There were two windows, tall, narrow and slit-like. They were wholly unglazed and unshuttered, and admitted air so sharply chill that it set Fallon to shivering. At one window bulked the massive figure of Helverson, gazing eagerly forth into the gray daylight.

"Nels!" exclaimed the American, sitting up. "I thought you were nearly dead. Those two wounds you got—"

Helverson turned. His blue eyes gleamed with a curious exaltation as he approached.

"Why, I *am* dead," said the Norwegian simply. "So are you."

Fallon felt a gust of impatience. "What are you talking about? You're as alive as I am."

"We are dead," Helverson repeated with firm conviction. "We died in that snowy gorge, and the Valkyries came and bore us here to Valhalla."

Fallon suddenly remembered. The crash of their plane, the fight with Heysing — and then that incredible troop of wild Valkyr-maids who had galloped up the gorge and had carried all three of them into an uncanny hidden valley that could not be seen from outside.

Surely that had all been delirium? Yet if so, where were they now and how had they come here? Fallon stumbled hastily to one of the narrow windows. Astonishment and awe fell upon him as he looked forth.

His window was high in that massive, square stone castle which hugged the looming cliff at the head of the valley. He could look straight down into paved courts and smaller stone buildings. Down there were mounted men and men afoot. But they wore armor and horned helmets and short fur jerkins. And they carried swords and shields and axes!

Fallon's dazed eyes lifted to search the distance. The gray daylight had a curiously pale, cloudy quality but by it he could see far back down the valley. Dark forests of shaggy pine and fir clothed its floor and the lower slopes of the bounding precipices. He glimpsed other, smaller stone castles out there, miles away. Most upsetting of all, he could nowhere see out of the valley, now that he was in it.

"I don't understand this," Fallon gasped. "There's no one at all lives in the wilderness of north Norway. What is this place?"

"It is Valhalla, the home of the old gods," Helverson said with absolute faith. "The paradise to which are borne all who die in battle.

"Was it not the Valkyries who brought us here?" the Norwegian continued. "Was their leader not Thor's daughter, the warrior-goddess Brynhild herself, she who is magic mistress of lightning, wind, and storm as her father was?"

"Thor's daughter?" Fallon remembered now the beautiful girl who had ridden unhelmed at the head of those wild warrior-maids, with a great lynx loping at her knee.

"Aye, the daughter of Thor, the god of lightnings," affirmed Helverson. "She it is who always leads the messengers of Odin."

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The American exploded. "Thor and Odin and the other old Norse gods are only myths! You must be out of your head from those wounds. Here, let me look at them."

HE OPENED Helverson's blood-stained jacket. A chill amazement shocked him to find that the Norwegian's two bullet-wounds had disappeared. There were only two livid scars to mark their place.

Stunned, Fallon raised his hand to his own temple. The furrow that Heysing's grazing bullet had cut there was gone. He could feel nothing but a healed scar.

"This is insane," he choked. "Our wounds couldn't have vanished like that. It's magic!"

"Aye, magic of the Aesir, of the old gods," rumbled Helverson devoutly. "Now that we are dead and in Valhalla, no wounds can harm us."

Fallon's Twentieth Century mind shook beneath the impact of unexplainable mystery. His skepticism wavered. What if they really *had* died back in that gorge?

He knew the legends of the old Norse gods. Legends of their fabulous home in Asgard, the castle Valhalla to which were borne all warriors who died in battle and who there lived immortally on. Legends that for thousands of years had been firmly believed by the fierce Vikings of the North. What if those stories were not legend, but *truth?*

"I won't believe it!" Fallon shouted, seeking to prop up tottering reason. "This is the year 1940, not the dark ages. And I'm not dead—I'm living. If I weren't living, would I feel cold?"

He was, indeed, shivering from the sharp chill of the air from the open windows. Looking around, he noticed fur jackets hanging from pegs in a corner of the stone room. With relief, he donned one of the short, jerkin-like garments.

In doing so, Fallon discovered inside his own uniform the heavy pistol he had wrenched from Heysing in the fight. Its magazine was still half full, and it gave him a sudden new feeling of confidence.

"Listen, I want you to get over that crazy notion that this is Valhalla, and get down to earth," he told Helverson urgently. "We're going to go out and find out where we are and how we got here, and what the shortest route to the northern coast villages is."

The Norwegian shook his yellow head. "We can't leave here. Those whom the Valkyr-maids bear to Asgard never return to men."

"*We'll* return to men," Fallon promised grimly. "The information I have about the Nazi defenses at Narvik will be vital if I can get it back to England, and I'm going to get it there."

He tucked the pistol inside his fur jacket and started toward the heavy plank door of the chamber. It opened suddenly before he reached it, and two men strode in.

They were figures out of history and romance. For they were Vikings, big, burly men whose yellow hair flowed to their shoulders and whose pale eyes were bleak as the northern ice. Each was armed with a heavy sword and round shield. Each wore a horned helmet, and a fur jacket over a mail shirt and tight breeches of soft leather.

ONE of the two Vikings, a man of over middle age with iron-hard, weather-seamed face, spoke curtly to Fallon and Helverson. He spoke in an archaic form of the Norse tongue, strange but comprehensible.

"The princess Brynhild commands your presence, strangers," he barked.

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"We will lead you."

"Brynhild! Thor's daughter!" cried Helverson. He turned excitedly to the American. "Said I not that it was so?"

Fallon was staring bewilderedly at the two Vikings. "You two are not men of the outer world!"

The older warrior shrugged. "We were of the outer world once. I am Tyr, captain of the Aesir, and this is Heimdall."

Helverson gasped, his eyes dilating with awe. "Tyr, the god of war? And Heimdall, the watcher of the gods?"

Fallon looked incredulously from the one warrior to the other, from the iron-hard face of the man who called himself Tyr to the alert, keen, middle-aged face of Heimdall.

The young American felt caught in a nightmare of unrealities. These men were as real as himself. Yet they claimed to be of the Aesir, the ancient Norse gods who had been legend for thousands of years.

Fallon struggled against the crumbling of his skepticism. "Then this *is* Valhalla?"

Tyr stared at him. "You stand in Valhalla castle, citadel of the Aesir and stronghold of Asgard."

He and Heimdall led the way out of the door, and the American pilot followed with Helverson as numbly as in a dream.

They went along a shadowy stone corridor and then down massive stairs. Fallon glimpsed men and women in the chambers and passageways of the castle. They seemed all of the same big, fair-haired race as his escort. The warriors wore armor, and carried sword or axe. Some of the lithe young girls were in glittering mail also. Others wore white gowns.

He and Helverson were conducted to a long stone hall of giant dimensions. Its only occupants were a group of towering chieftains of the Aesir who were gathered near a raised stone dais at the farther end.

As they neared that group, Fallon went tense with recognition and reawakened hatred. For Victor Heysing stood there. The handsome, blond young Nazi officer, looking oddly out of place in his black uniform, was watching Fallon's approach with narrowed eyes.

"So that devil was brought here too," Fallon muttered tautly. "Then I'm not dreaming. *He's* real, anyway."

"Thor's daughter!" Helverson was gasping. "I told you that it was she!"

FALLON followed the Norwegian's eager, reverent stare, his eyes lifting to the girl who sat on the dais in a black marble chair.

He thrilled to a shock as of tangible force. All thought of his bitter enemy was swept away by the tumult of his emotions. His first thought was that this girl who was looking down at him *was* a goddess.

She did not now wear the shining mail that she had worn as leader of the wild Valkyries. That had been put aside, and almost her only garment was a short black kirtle held by a jewelled girdle, and high-laced sandals of soft leather. Her only upper garment was the long hair that fell like a torrent of golden flame around her high, white breasts. A queer, lambent light seemed to glow from her body.

It was the unearthly, dynamic beauty of the face that held Fallon's eyes. The royal beauty of perfectly chiselled features and sweet red lips was a frame for eyes whose blue gaze met his like a sword-shock. Those eyes, clear azure depths in which tiny lightnings seemed constantly to flash and play, held him hypnotized.

A low snarl woke him from the spell.

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Beside the marble chair of Thor's daughter, crouched the white lynx. The beast was huge beyond the custom of its kind. And it was showing menacing fangs and talons as its slant green eyes blazed at the American.

Brynhild's voice rang impatient, silver command to the animal. "Be silent!"

The lynx settled back upon its belly obediently, but it continued to glare at Fallon.

The eyes of Brynhild ran over Fallon's tall, lean figure and black hair, glanced at the eager, massive face of Helverson, and then returned to the American.

"*You* do not look like one of our northern races, dark one," she said to Fallon with musing interest. "What is your name?"

Unsteadily, he told her. Brynhild repeated it, her sweet red lips forming it oddly. Suddenly she asked, "Why were you and this other outlander battling in the gorge?"

Fallon shot a bitter glance at Heysing. "He is our enemy. Our peoples are at war."

The result of his statement amazed him. A flash lit Brynhild's blue eyes. And from the towering Aesir chieftains came chorus of eager and excited exclamations.

"War?" cried the fierce-eyed Tyr. "War in the northland again? You bring good news, outlander!"

A murmur of exultant agreement came from the other Aesir chieftains. The fact of war in the outer world seemed to stir them like a trumpet-blast.

"It has been long that the outer peoples have slumbered in soft, fat peace," Brynhild declared. "Tell me of this war, stranger."

Fallon pointed accusingly at Victor Heysing. "His people, the Germans, began the war. They have invaded the northland and attacked its people without reason, and my own outland countries seek to help the Norse defenders resist."

Heysing took a step forward, speaking hastily to the listening daughter of Thor.

"It is not so, princess!" denied the Nazi. "My people are of the north themselves, blood-cousins of the Norse. We came into the northland only to protect our Norse friends from the degenerate outlanders who would have used them as tools for their own purposes."

Helberson uttered a roar of anger. "The German lies! We Norse wished none of his 'protection'!"

FALLON spoke earnestly to the girl, whose brilliant blue eyes were searching their faces during this hot dispute.

"Is it possible to leave this valley?" Fallon asked. "I have information that would help my people drive the invaders out of the northland, if I can get it to them."

He waited tensely for the answer. He could not, in spite of everything, believe that he and Helverson were really dead. If they were not, it deepened the mystery of this unearthly fulfillment of the ancient legends of the gods. But it also meant that he was duty-bound to escape this uncanny place and get his information back to his commanders.

Brynhild spoke decisively. "You cannot leave the valley of Asgard, outlander. At least not until we have learned all the truth about this war of which you speak."

She brooded, her chin upon her white hand. "We Aesir are tired of peace. Now that war has come again to the northland, it may be that once again we shall know the joy of battle!"

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That electric flash came and went again in her eyes, fleeting revelation of a wild, fierce, untamed spirit.

Fallon protested. "But I *must* get out of here and get back to my own people!"

Brynhild's blue gaze darkened stormily. Her silver voice flared. "No one here in Asgard says 'must' to the daughter of Thor, outlander!"

Helverson plucked at Fallon's sleeve and whispered frantically. "Do not anger the goddess!"

Brynhild was continuing haughtily. "It is not often now that I ride forth into the outer snows with my Valkyr-maids. It has been our custom, when we do so, to bring back wounded men we happened to find, and give them life here. But none of them leaves this valley thereafter!"

Victor Heysing gave Fallon a taunting smile, as the German understood that the young American could not get away with his information.

The triumph in that smile infuriated Fallon. He felt desperate. He must somehow get out of this mysterious valley of ancient gods. The fate of an Allied attack on Narvik depended on his doing so.

His hand slipped inside his fur jacket and grasped the butt of his pistol. He suddenly flashed out the weapon and covered Brynhild with it. His lean face was dark and tense.

"This is an outland weapon," he told her harshly. "It can kill you in an instant. You are going to allow me to leave this place."

A roar of rage broke from the Aesir chieftains, and their swords rasped from their sheaths. The white lynx crouched and snarled, gathering itself to spring upon the American. Helverson, appalled by his action, seemed petrified by superstitious horror.

"Keep back, all of you!" Fallon shouted. "Your princess will die before you can touch me."

It was bluff on Fallon's part—wild, desperate bluff.

BRYNHILD was laughing! Sheer amusement rippled in her silver laughter as she looked down at Fallon. With a gesture, she had restrained the crouching lynx and the furious Aesir.

"Do you really think you could kill the daughter of Thor with that toy?" she mocked. "Why, stranger, you are mad, I think. Watch!"

And she levelled her hand in a swift, thrusting gesture. What followed was almost beyond Fallon's comprehension.

Lightning seemed to leap from her hand, a flashing bolt of electric flame that struck his pistol and sent it flying through the air.

Electric flame struck Fallon's pistol

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Fallon staggered, his whole arm suddenly numb from shock. He felt half-stunned, wholly unable as yet to *believe* that the girl above had actually wielded such force. He saw the awe on Helverson's face, the amazement and sudden calculation on Heysing's. But clearest in his dazed vision were the contemptuous blue eyes of Brynhild.

Magic-mistress of lightnings she might be, but that cool contempt in her face swept Fallon to a climax of unreasoning rage and despair. Heedless of consequences, he rushed forward at the girl on the dais.

CHAPTER IV

Magic Menace

BRYNHILD instantly moved her white hands faster than the eye could follow, in a curious weaving gesture. Her whole body seemed to *flame*.

Dancing brands of lightning blazed from her hands to form an awful, dazzling curtain of electric fire in front of her. Crashing thunder shook the great stone hall. Fallon recoiled staggeringly from that curtain of lightning—and swiftly, it was gone.

"Good God!" husked the American, staring at the girl with unbelieving eyes.

Roars of anger came from the Aesir captains. One of them, a tall, fair, sullen-faced chieftain, raised his sword to lunge at Fallon.

"Wait, Thialfi!" rang Brynhild's silver command. "I said not that the man was to be killed."

The chietain called Thialfi halted, but protested angrily. "And why should he not be killed, when he has dared threaten one of us Aesir?"

"*I* rule the Aesir, cousin Thialfi," she reminded imperiously. "You grow too presumptuous, I think—too much as your father Loki was."

She laughed softly, eyeing Fallon. "This outlander has courage, even though he is not of the northern folk. He shall not die—yet."

Fallon stood, still literally stunned by the incredible phenomenon that had almost cost his life. Was this wildly beautiful girl human? Could any human have evoked that crashing blaze of lightning?

Could any but a goddess have loosed such forces? A goddess who could control the very elements of nature? Magic of superhuman powers clung about this girl like a tangible and terrible aura.

Helverson's awed whisper echoed his whirling thoughts. "She is, indeed, daughter of Thor, the storm-god of lightnings."

Brynhild heard the Norwegian, and nodded her fair head. "Yes, Norseman. I am daughter of Thor and granddaughter of Odin, and though Thor and Odin are gone now, I hold their wisdom and their power."

Victor Heysing stepped forward. The amazement on the Nazi's blond, handsome face had now been replaced by a breathless eagerness and excitement.

"Princess, *I* never doubted your power," the German said quickly. "Yet I am bewildered by all these things. My own people have for three thousand years reverenced the names of Odin and Thor and the other Aesir, yet we dreamed not that any of you still existed. Are you really the ancient gods?"

Brynhild mused. "Are we gods? You of the outer world always thought so. I remember how your world hailed me and my Valkyr-maids as goddesses when we rode forth, a thousand of your years ago."

"A thousand years ago?" gasped Heysing. "Your pardon, princess—I do not presume to doubt. But if you

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Aesir are immortal—"

"I said not that we were immortal," Brynhild answered impatiently. "A thousand of your outside world's years equals but ten of *our* years. Time is slower in this valley—a hundred times slower."

THE shock of that revelation woke Mart Fallon's numbed mind to life. Was it possible that that was what underlay all the awesome mystery of this valley of the gods?

"You would not understand if I were to explain to you," Brynhild was continuing, half-contemptuously. "Your outland wisdom is only a practical science of matter and machines. You have nothing of the deeper wisdom of cosmic powers and forces which we Aesir learned here."

Her brilliant blue eyes brooded. "This much, I will tell you. Time is an attribute or dimension of space. And space, as you may be beginning to learn by now, is not static but is a curved, expanding sphere. The strain of expansion causes faults or weak spots in that space-time sphere—spots where time is foreshortened. This valley is such a spot. A year in our valley equals a hundred years outside it.

"It was three thousand of your years ago that my people, the Aesir, found this magic valley. They were but one of the Norse races of that time, warlike Vikings who followed their chieftain Odin through the northern wilderness in search of a new home. They came upon this valley and settled in it, and named it Asgard.

"Three thousand of your years ago that was—but only thirty of *our* years! Here, under the wise leadership of Odin, my people built their homes. And here Odin and his son Thor delved deep into the cosmic forces that are brought to a focus in this fault of the space-time sphere, and won for themselves such powers as your outer world knows not."

Brynhild's face was dreaming. "I was born in this valley Asgard, twenty years ago by my time—two thousand years ago by yours. I was but a little child when my grandfather Odin and my father Thor taught me the first rudiments of their wisdom. We Aesir were great, then. Rumor of our powers and our superhuman length of life drifted to the outer world, and the northland races out there worshipped us as gods."

Bitterness came into her voice. "But pride and ambition brought tragedy among us, when I was still but a child. My own father's cousin, the brilliant and evil Loki, aspired to replace my house as ruler of the Aesir. Dreadful battle came from Loki's rebellion—battle in which not only he but Odin and my father Thor also met their deaths."

The Aesir chieftain named Thialfi made angry protest to Brynhild. "Can you never forget my father's rebellion? All that is dead and past now."

The girl's eyes flared at him momentarily, but then she relaxed. "Yes, all that is of the dead past now," she admitted. "You know that I have never held your father's evildoing against you, Thialfi. You were but a child then, as I was a child."

HER golden head lifted in pride. "But even as a child, I succeeded to the rulership of the Aesir, and inherited the powers of Odin and my father Thor over natural forces."

"And you have ruled us with wisdom, niece Brynhild," the stern-faced Tyr declared loyally. "It is not your fault that life has grown tame and wearisome for us in this peaceful valley."

"This flat and featureless peace wearies *me*, too!" Brynhild exclaimed al-

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most fiercely. "We Aesir were made for war, not for soft living. We rust and rot away our lives here, without the joy of battle."

She made a scornful gesture. "But it would have been no use for us to have left our valley for the outer world. Until now, tame and ignoble peace has reigned out there in the northland for hundreds of their years."

Mart Fallon had listened in deepening bewilderment and dismay. So this was the incredible reality behind the age-old legends of the Norse gods and their immortality and superhuman powers over nature?

It was logical enough, his dazed mind admitted. Granted that this secret valley in the northern wilderness was really a fault or weak spot in the space-time continuum, it followed that time here *could* be foreshortened so that a hundred days outside were but a day here. It followed, too, that this spot could well be the focus of tremendous natural forces whose mastery had been won by the rulers of these Aesir.

But, and this was what dismayed Fallon in his first realization, if that were true, then the hours he had already spent in this valley amounted to weeks or months in the outer world! By this time, the battle of Narvik would have been decided long ago. His plan to take his vital information back to his commanders was now hopelessly obsolete and useless.

Fallon became aware that Victor Heysing was speaking to the Aesir princess. The young Nazi officer seemed possessed by excitement.

"Princess, not all the outland peoples are tame and soft," Heysing affirmed. "My own German people, who are blood-kin to you Norse, reject like yourselves the soft blandishments of peace in favor of the stern ideals of war."

The Nazi's voice had a ring of fanaticism. "We have a Leader, the greatest in the outside world. He has brought war back to the world, though the cowardly southern and western nations pleaded for peace. He has made of us a race of warriors who stride to conquest of all the world."

Heysing leaned forward, his eyes glowing. "You Aesir could join us in that mighty battle, princess. A battle whose loot will be the world itself! You are a northern race like us. If you joined us, your powers over natural forces would sweep the soft peoples of the world before us!"

Fallon was thunderstruck. The Nazi, like himself, had realized that this valley was the focus of cosmic natural forces which somehow the daughter of Thor knew how to harness and use.

WITH characteristic opportunism, Heysing was seeking to enlist the unguessable power of those weapons upon the side of Hitler's legions! He had proposed flattering alliance to the Aesir princess, meaning without doubt to use her and her powers as the tool of his conquest-minded country.

Brynhild's eyes had flashed as she listened. "It is good to hear that one race of the outer world has remained hard and warlike!"

And the Aesir chieftains had become suddenly tense with fierce excitement.

"Princess Brynhild, I favor this man's plan!" exclaimed Thialfi, a savage light on his sullen face now. "With you and your powers to lead us, and the hordes of his German race to follow us, we *could* loot the world!"

"At least, it would mean battle and action again instead of rotting away in this valley," muttered the tall Aesir captain, Heimdall.

Appalled, Fallon burst into interruption. "Do you realize what this Ger-

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man would have you do?" he cried to Thor's daughter. "He would have you join a leader whose hands are red with the blood of slaughtered nations, a nation that without pretext has attacked unoffending peoples."

Brynhild looked down at the American with an expression of disdain. "I thought you were a warrior, outlander. Yet you talk as though war was horrible."

"It *is* horrible," Fallon declared from the depths of his feelings. "It is to end war forever that my people are fighting the German race."

The daughter of Thor and the Aesir chieftains stared at him with a cold, biting contempt, as though he had said something shameful.

"By the Norns, the German spoke truth when he said that the other outland races are degenerate!" exclaimed Thialfi scornfully. "This fellow is fit only to be a thrall."

"*My* people do not hold such cowardly beliefs," put in Heysing proudly. "We exalt war and the warrior above all else."

He looked up eagerly at Brynhild. "Will you join us, princess? Will you ally your powers to the only true warrior race of the outer world?"

"I say, let us join these Germans," Thialfi declared, and there was a quick chorus of agreement from many of the Aesir lords.

"I remind you again that *I* rule the Aesir," Brynhild flared at Loki's son.

Until now, Helverson had stood beside Fallon, bewilderedly listening to the excited discussion. Now, for the first time, the big Norwegian spoke in his rumbling voice to the girl on the marble seat.

"You would not join the Germans?" he asked incredulously. "You are the Aesir, the ancient hero-gods of our Norse race. And the Germans are our enemies."

Heysing hastily intervened. "We are not enemies of the Norse people," he denied. "As I told you, we seek only to protect them from the cowardly western nations who would trick them for selfish purposes."

The Nazi added quickly to Brynhild, "Once you Aesir appeared and joined us, all the northern peoples would fall in behind us. For your names have an ancient power in the hearts of the north."

Fallon knew that the Nazi was right in that last claim. The appearance of the Aesir of ancient legend, led by Thor's daughter herself, *would* swing age-old Scandinavian beliefs toward the side of the Germans.

BEFORE the American could protest Heysing's other falsehoods, Brynhild rose to her feet. Her blue eyes were brooding and thoughtful as she looked down at them.

"Lords of the Aesir, the decision on this matter is not to be made lightly," she told them. "Before I decide, I shall take counsel of all the chieftains of our people. Summon them here for council tonight."

Thialfi pointed to the Nazi. "With your permission, I'll keep this man with me today. I wish to hear more of his plan."

Brynhild nodded curtly. "But bring him to the council here in Valhalla tonight."

Her eyes rested a moment on Fallon's dark, desperate face. "See that this man and his comrade make no attempt to leave the valley," she ordered. "I make you responsible for them, Tyr."

Her slim figure disappeared through a curtained doorway beside the dais, the white lynx padding silently at her side.

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Heysing went with Thialfi, glancing back with covert triumph at the American. Fallon found Helverson plucking at his sleeve.

"I cannot understand," the Norwegian said, his massive face anxious and puzzled. "These are the old gods of my people. Surely they would not join with the invaders who now devastate our land?"

"They won't join the Nazis if I can help it," Fallon said tautly. "Nels, we've got to stop that somehow! My God, that girl can control the lightning and forces of nature itself! If the Nazis get hold of her powers—"

The dreadful possibilities unreeled in his mind. They held disaster for the Allied cause. That disaster would not come from the mere addition of a few thousand fierce warriors to the Nazi legions. Not even though the appearance of the legended Aesir as allies of the Axis might well superstitiously influence the northern peoples into following Hitler also.

The real menace was in those tremendous and mysterious powers of which Brynhild was mistress. This unique fault in the continuum of space-time was the focus of cosmic forces unknown to the outer world. The ruling house of the Aesir had learned how to wield those forces. If Germany learned that also, its scientists would be able to forge weapons that would blast the armies of the democracies from existence.

"Heysing must not persuade Brynhild to join the Nazis!" he said feverishly. "They'll use her and her warriors as tools, and as soon as they have learned the secret of her powers, will throw her aside."

Helverson groaned. "How can *we* stop it? These Aesir long for war and battle. They are tempted by the German's promise of fighting."

"They're a race with the Viking warlike traditions of centuries ago," Fallon agreed. "They think war is all that is manly and admirable."

"Thor's daughter seemed to like you, Fallon," the Norwegian said doubtfully. "I could see that you interested her. Maybe if you made love to her, you could turn her against Heysing's proposal?"

"Don't be a fool," the American retorted. "She and all the rest of these people think I'm a coward now because I said I hated war. We've got to find some better plan than that to beat that damned Nazi—"

He broke off. The chieftain Tyr was approaching them, for now the great hall of Valhalla was almost empty except for themselves.

TYR had a half-disgusted expression on his hard, grizzled face. "Now I have you on my hands to guard," he growled. "Let me give you fair warning—at the slightest attempt to escape, you'll be killed."

"That's clear enough," Fallon admitted. "But you don't have to lock us up in that chamber again, do you?"

Tyr shrugged wide shoulders. "You can come out with me to watch our warriors at their games, if you wish. Or perhaps the sight of even friendly fighting would sicken a lover of peace like yourself?"

Fallon flushed at the gibe, but answered evenly. "We'll go out with you and watch."

As they accompanied the armored Aesir chieftain down a long stone hall, the American asked him a question.

"Is that fellow Thialfi very close to the princess Brynhild?"

Tyr looked at him quizzically. "He hopes to be her bridegroom. Though I do not know why that should interest you, outlander."

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Fallon was dismayed by the information. He knew the sulky-faced Thialfi strongly favored Heysing's proposal. If the man were that close to Thor's daughter, he would surely influence her toward the plan.

The situation seemed more and more hopeless, but the American refused to surrender hope. Somehow, he told himself desperately, he *must* find a way to defeat the Nazi's evil scheme.

They emerged from the massive face of Valhalla castle into the chill day. Looking back upward, he was struck by the way in which the citadel hugged the sheer, frowning rock cliff that rose far overhead.

Helverson was staring puzzledly at the gray sky. "I cannot understand why there is day and night in this valley," he muttered. "If the time here is a hundred times faster than outside, there should be daylight and night every few minutes."

"You're forgetting that this is the midnight sun country, far north of the Arctic Circle," Fallon reminded him. "The day and night are each months long, outside here. In here, they're only hours long."

"Then it's already been months since we entered here!" gasped the Norwegian. "What has happened out in my country since then?"

Horsemen were galloping away down the valley toward the other distant castles, spurring along narrow roads through the dark forest.

"They go to summon all our chieftains to the council tonight," grunted Tyr. "Niord and Bragi and Hermod and all the rest will be here."

The grizzled captain led the way to a small natural amphitheater near Valhalla castle, in which a crowd was gathering. Tall Viking warriors, lithe Valkyr-girls in glittering mail, older women in long white linen gowns, even children —all had come to watch the games.

FALLON was astonished by the character of the contests. Aesir warriors fought with padded battle-axes that were still highly dangerous to skulls. They wrestled furiously, with many bruising falls until one or the other was senseless. They sparred with sword and shield until both contestants were bleeding from serious wounds. The crowd applauded wildly.

"You Aesir have rough sports," the American commented in amazement. "I'd think that you would all kill each other in these games."

"Now and then a man gets killed but not often," Tyr answered casually. "Many are wounded, but Brynhild's magic makes them whole again."

He added discontentedly, "But we're tired of this mock fighting. There's nothing else to do—nothing but hunt occasionally in the forests and supervise the thralls who till our fields. We'll be joyful if Brynhild leads us forth to taste real war again!"

From nearby, the chieftain Heimdall launched an ironical invitation at Fallon. "Would you care to join in the sword-contests, outlander?"

A roar of insulting laughter went up from all the Aesir. Fallon turned dull red, knowing what these fierce, warlike men now thought of him.

He rose to his feet, determined to accept the satirical invitation and prove that he was no coward. He remembered enough of sabre-fencing from military-school days to make at least a showing.

But a sudden inspiration crossed his brain. It was the idea for which he had been seeking to defeat Victor Heysing's plans. It might work, and if it did, it would crush the Nazi's scheme.

Fallon sat down again, slowly and unwillingly. He hated doing so, but he

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dared take no chances until he could carry out his idea tonight.

"I thought that you would think twice before entering the games," Heimdall said scathingly to him.

Tyr turned and glared at the American. "By the Norns, you love peace indeed. The one who calls himself a German was right about the softness of your race."

Fallon ventured no reply. But on the way back to the castle later with their disgusted guard, he found a chance to whisper to Helverson.

"I've an idea for ending Heysing's devilish plans," he said rapidly. "If that Nazi *dies* tonight, his scheme will die too!"

DARKNESS came softly and slowly down on the valley Asgard. It was strange to think that this slow nightfall was really the coming of the long months of Arctic night to the lands outside.

Torches flared in Valhalla's halls and passageways. Chieftains of the Aesir were constantly riding up from the castles farther down the valley, by now. Each brought with him retinue of excited fighting-men.

Tyr conducted Fallon and the Norwegian into the great council-hall. In its red torchlight, hundreds of the Aesir lords were gathered. Thialfi was there, near the throne-dais, and Victor Heysing was with him.

"Homage to the princess!" roared the shout of fierce throats as Brynhild entered and faced them from the dais.

Pride and consciousness of power were brilliant in her blue eyes as she faced them. The white lynx crouched beside her, whining softly.

Before she or anyone else could speak, Mart Fallon put his desperate idea into execution. He took a step toward the dais and raised his voice loudly.

"Princess Brynhild, hear me before your council opens!" he demanded. He pointed at Victor Heysing. "That man has said that I lied when I told you his Leader and his purposes are evil. I maintain that he lies. That forms blood-feud between us, by your own Viking traditions."

His voice rose louder. "I claim warrior's right to settle that feud here and now. By tradition, you are bound to give swords to my enemy and myself and let us fight to the death!"

CHAPTER V

Storm Sorcery

IT WAS Fallon's desperate inspiration. He had dimly remembered that ancient Viking custom of permitting a warrior to settle a personal feud by public single combat. And he had seen in that a hazardous chance to avert Heysing's evil schemes by ending the Nazi's life.

How hazardous the chance was, he fully realized. Heysing, like most German officers of his class, would in all probability possess more skill with the saber than Fallon's own rusty practice. But the American's desperation was such that he would almost have welcomed death for himself if he could be sure of taking the Nazi with him.

The torchlit hall was in an uproar. The fierce Aesir chieftains had instantly warmed to the prospect of a death-duel.

But Thialfi was on his feet, glaring at Fallon. "It is a trick!" he accused. "The dark outlander is a coward who has no wish to fight."

Victor Heysing himself spoke up confidently. "I am ready to meet him," affirmed the Nazi loudly. "We Germans do not dodge battle."

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A roar of applause greeted his boast. In this brief interval, Brynhild had been staring down at Fallon with a puzzled light in her eyes.

"I cannot understand—," she murmured perplexedly, but then broke off, and spoke in clear, chill tones to the American. "You have claimed Viking right and you shall have it, outlander. Heimdall, give them helmets, shields and swords."

A wide space was hastily cleared for the duel, in front of the dais on which Brynhild sat. Expectant excitement pervaded the throng of Aesir warriors as the preparations were made.

Helverson was expostulating with Fallon. He paid little attention, for Heimdall now had brought him the gleaming horned helmet, the small, heavy metal shield and long sword he was to use in the combat.

Tyr showed him how to hold the shield upon his left arm. "You'd best handle a sword better than a shield or you're dead now," he grunted.

The helmet felt heavy on Fallon's head, and the shield was an awkward encumbrance as he gripped his sword and stepped to meet Heysing.

Brynhild's voice rang clearly. "The fight is to the death, or until one combatant shall admit himself vanquished," she told them.

Victor Heysing had a thin, triumphant smile on his handsome blond face as he turned to face the American.

"It is too bad," he mocked Fallon, "that when you got this crazy idea, you did not know I was saber-champion at Heidelberg."

Fallon set his teeth and said nothing. The daughter of Thor, leaning forward, spoke sharply. "Begin!"

IT WAS almost death for Fallon in the first minute. Heysing had not lied when he had boasted of his skill with the saber. The Nazi came in with a rush, his pale eyes gleaming behind his lunging blade. He was obviously determined to finish the fight as quickly as possible.

Fallon tried to parry that blow with the shield, and nearly lost his life. For his clumsy use of the unaccustomed shield merely caused it to deflect the lunging blade toward his heart. Only a frantic sidestep saved him, but the sword of his enemy slashed his sleeve as it grazed him.

Fallon stabbed back, uncertainly at first and then with rapidly increasing sureness as his rusty skill came back to him. But Heysing deftly parried the thrusts, and came back with wicked, slicing sweeps before which the American had to give ground.

Heysing knew himself the superior swordsman for certain now, and exultant satisfaction shone in his eyes.

"I am glad you challenged me, Fallon," he said mockingly under his breath as they fenced. "It will greatly increase my prestige with these people when I kill you."

Fallon made no answer. Cold premonition of imminent failure and death were chilling him. He could not get through the German's guard for a moment, and the other's sword seemed thrusting from everywhere.

As they circled and struck, blade ringing against blade or against a clanging shield, he glimpsed the torchlit, fierce faces of the Aesir throng watching the fight in delighted silence. And he had momentary vision of Brynhild's white, beautiful face and widened blue eyes.

"Take it!" hissed Heysing suddenly, and his sword-point came in like the head of a striking snake toward Fallon's heart.

Fallon frantically tried to raise the heavy shield but was only able to de-

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flect the thrust. He felt the white-hot sting of steel searing along his left shoulder, and sprang back with blood wetting his jacket.

Roar of excitement came from the watching Aesir throng at the sight. And now Heysing was coming in with wolf-savageness, thrusting, lunging, slicing, using all his skill to beat down Fallon's guard.

Another roar from the crowd, as steel whizzed past Fallon's head and inflicted a grazing cut on his cheek.

"Finish him, now!" the voice of Thialfi was shouting in adjuration to the German.

And Fallon, red with blood and dazedly fighting off the Nazi's savage attack, glimpsed Brynhild's eyes looking at him in *pity*.

Crimson rage exploded in the American's brain. He'd be dead in a minute and this damned crowd of wolves would yell with glee. By Heaven, he'd do his best to take the Nazi with him!

Furiously, he flung away the encumbering shield and helmet. Bareheaded and with his lean, dark face raging, he flung himself forward and struck like a madman at the German.

"The outlander is berserk!" rose a yell from the watching Aesir crowd.

FALLON hardly heard it. He saw Heysing through red mists. The German's face was startled. He recoiled from the crazy attack.

No fencing or scientific swordsmanship now! Fallon was possessed by the rage to kill. And the furious sweeps of his sword were an unpredictable attack against which Heysing had no immediate defense.

The convulsive strength of his strokes beat down the Nazi's parrying blade. As Heysing staggered, Fallon slashed fiercely in again. The German tried to raise his shield. It caught the first impact of the American's sword, but the sword flashed off it and bit into Heysing's side.

The Nazi swayed, dropping his sword and then falling heavily. His helmet hit the stone floor with a resounding clang. He lay still.

The sword bit into Heysing's side

"The outland berserk has conquered!" cried Heimdall incredulously.

Thialfi rushed out, his sullen face furious. "The outlander did not conquer cleanly! The German slipped in the blood on the floor."

Voices disputed that assertion of Thialfi's, but other voices supported it. The uproar in the torchlit hall of Valhalla was tumultuous.

Thialfi was appealing to Brynhild. "Let the duel be fought again when the German's wound is healed! That is but justice."

Fallon leaned on his bloody sword, panting for breath and with those red mists only now dissolving from his brain. Brynhild, Tyr, all the Aesir, were eyeing him now with a perplexed respect.

They knew he was no coward now,

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he thought with grim satisfaction. For they thought him a "berserk," most dreaded of Viking warriors, a man who flung away his armor when possessed by blood-madness in battle.

Brynhild raised her hand imperiously to still the clamorous dispute about the fairness of Fallon's triumph.

"I did not see the German slip, cousin Thialfi," she said curtly. "But since you claim he did, he shall be allowed the chance to repeat the duel when he is fit to fight again."

Fallon, standing a little weak and dizzy from loss of blood of his own wounds, made no objection to that decision.

"It's all right," he told Helverson, who had sprung to his side anxiously. "Heysing will be unable to hatch his scheme until he recovers, and that will give us time to figure a way of beating him."

But he was soon to discover that his calculations had reckoned without the fantastic powers of which Brynhild was mistress.

Thor's daughter had come down from the dais toward him. That new, puzzled respect was strong in her dynamic face as she spoke.

"Outlander, I shall soon heal those wounds of yours," she told him. "I see now that we misjudged you. Come with me."

"And the German?" Thialfi interjected urgently, gesturing to the prostrate man.

Brynhild nodded her golden head. "He, too. Bring him, Tyr."

She raised her clear voice to the Aesir throng. "We cannot hold council now, chieftains. It must wait until the morrow."

BRYNHILD moved through the curtained doorway beside the throne-dais, with the white lynx padding softly at her side. Fallon unsteadily followed her, and Tyr came after them, carrying the unconscious Nazi.

Fallon found himself with the daughter of Thor in a torchlit stone corridor that led toward the rear of Valhalla castle. It ended in a heavy door of massive bronze, beyond which was a spiral stairway tunnelled out of the solid rock of the cliff.

"Where do we go?" Fallon asked doubtfully, as they entered the dark stairway.

"To heal your wounds," Brynhild answered impatiently. "I have the power to do so. Come!"

She grasped his wrist, leading up the twisting rock steps. It was the first time Fallon had experienced her touch. It sent a thrilling, faintly electric shock through him, as though life and energy flowed into him from the contact.

And Brynhild's slim white body glowed in the darkness of the stair with that dim lambency that had been only barely noticeable in the lighted hall. It made her seem more eerily unhuman —and yet the warm, tingling clasp of her fingers was far from that.

The lynx snarled from the darkness above them, and Brynhild laughed softly. "Inro is jealous of you, outlander."

Fallon felt a queer thudding of his pulses. He could hear Tyr grunting below them as he climbed with his senseless burden.

They went higher and higher inside the cliff. Fallon estimated vaguely that they must be near its top. A dim uproar of winds came to his ears from above, and gusty currents of freezing air smote his face.

They emerged suddenly into darkness and cold, buffeting winds. Fallon stopped short, momentarily appalled by the giddiness and danger of their situation.

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This was a small, flat platform hewn out of the solid rock at the very peak of the lofty cliff. It was only a dozen feet across, and completely unrailed and open to the winds. Far, far below gleamed the torchlit windows of Valhalla castle. Overhead pressed the dull black canopy of the magic valley's night sky.

Poised above the solid rock floor of this dizzy perch was a massive silver ring nine feet in diameter, carved with strange runic symbols. It hung mysteriously in midair. Moving with fearless lightness, Brynhild led him inside this queer circle.

"Put the German down here, Tyr," she bade, and the old Aesir obeyed and laid the senseless German inside the silver runic circle.

Then Tyr hastily stepped back out of the circle. He muttered, "I'll wait down inside the stair. I do not much like your healing magic, niece Brynhild."

FALLON found himself swaying on his feet, partly from the dizziness of his precarious situation and partly from the wounds that were slowly draining his strength. Brynhild touched him steadyingly, and again, tingling strength seemed to flow into him from the touch.

At her direction, he stripped off his jacket and stood with bare, blood-stained torso shivering in the freezing wind. He also removed Heysing's jacket, exposing the deep wound in the senseless Nazi's side. The white lynx had retreated to the stair, snarling uneasily.

"Now stand close beside me, outlander, and move not out of the rune-circle for your life," Brynhild warned him. "The forces I am about to summon can heal swiftly—but they can kill swiftly too."

Standing just outside the circle, Thor's daughter raised her naked white arms toward the night sky. Her blue eyes shone brilliant through the wind-swirled torrent of her pale gold hair. And the uncanny lambency that invested her fair body deepened to a glow.

Great gusts of wind suddenly buffeted them furiously, h o w l i n g and shrieking in their ears as though seeking to tear them from the lofty cliff. The chill night was suddenly roaringly alive with rising storm-voices. Fallon felt a shivering not wholly born of the cold.

Brynhild's silver, ringing laughter pealed out on the raging wind. Her face was turned toward the zenith, and from her upstretched finger-tips seemed to dart tiny threads of light. The American's hair rose on his head. He sensed the ominous gathering of vast forces.

Crash! He staggered, dazed and blinded by the terrific bolt of lightning that stabbed down at them. That flaring bolt seemed to strike down toward Brynhild's upstretched hands, and then to be deflected toward the silver ring. Another awful bolt followed it, and another and another. Electric flames danced dazzlingly on the silver rune-ring.

Fallon shouted hoarsely to the girl, his voice thin and puny against the rocking thunderclaps. "If that lightning strikes us—"

"It will not, for I am its mistress," pealed Brynhild's voice. "But keep here within the ring!"

The scene was mind-shattering, to the American. The almost continuous bolts of lightning striking all around the ring, each sheeted flare throwing into wild illumination Brynhild's glowing figure; the deafening thunder; the shrieking winds that swept their dizzy perch.

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Electric flame now completely encircled them in a slowly rising wall. Fallon felt the thrilling shock of electrical or other forces that pervaded every cell of his body. His brain spun with vertigo.

"Stand fast!" warned Thor's daughter over the crashing tumult. "It will be but a moment."

IT SEEMED more like a timeless eternity to Fallon's stunned brain that he stood with the Aesir girl and the unconscious German in the heart of a blazing, inconceivably powerful sphere of electric force.

The thrilling tingle in his body was almost unbearable. He looked down and saw violet electric brush spraying from his own body. He heard Brynhild laugh above the smash of crashing lightning.

"It is enough," she seemed to be saying. And she lowered her arms.

Magically, the bolts of lightning ceased. And as the rocking reverberations of thunder ebbed away, the wall of flaming force around the silver runering sank and died.

Fallon, coming slowly out of his daze, found himself standing with Brynhild in the windy darkness. Her body still shone uncannily bright, and her brilliant, laughing blue eyes mocked his stupefaction.

"Look at your wounds now, outlander," she told him.

Fallon did so, and felt the shock of increased amazement. The stab in his left shoulder and the cut upon his cheek were both incredibly healed, as though by weeks of time. No trace of the wounds was left except two faint scars. And he felt none of his former weakness, now.

He looked down at Heysing. The Nazi still lay unconscious, but that deep sword-slash in his side was healed to a smooth scar too. And his breathing now seemed easy and normal.

"He is completely healed, as you are," Brynhild nodded to the unbelieving American. "He will wake in a few hours, as well as ever."

She raised her voice. "Ho, Tyr! Come and take the German—my magic is ended."

Tyr came reluctantly up onto the windy place, with the white lynx bounding ahead of him to rub its fierce head against Brynhild.

"I heard you at it," growled the old Aesir chieftain. "Hel take me if I ever liked it, niece. I thought the lightnings would split the whole cliff this time."

He shouldered Heysing's senseless weight as though the man was a straw, and returned with him to the stair inside the cliff.

Fallon looked earnestly at the radiant face of Thor's daughter. "Brynhild, is this how Helverson and I were healed of our wounds when we were first brought here by you?"

She nodded. "Yes, by the healing magic of the lightning. I have so healed more than one wounded or dying warrior whom my Valkyries and I found outside and brought here, in past years."

HIS dazed mind groped for possible explanations. He could understand that the terrific bombardment of electric radiation to which he had been subjected might by concentrated therapeutic power cause unprecedented acceleration of the processes of cell-regeneration. But how was it that Brynhild was able to summon lightning at will?

She smiled cryptically at that question. "Can you not guess an answer? You have heard that this valley represents a fault or weak spot in the fabric of space-time. Is it not possible that the vast electric forces outside our uni-

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verse could easily be admitted here? And could not Odin, and Thor, and I, use those forces to convert our living bodies into powerful electric accumulators which could attract the lightning?"

Her smile deepened as she continued teasingly, "Or perhaps that is only dust that I throw into your eyes. Perhaps there are strange spirits of force inherent in the elements of nature, and maybe I can control those elementals. What think you to be the truth, outlander?"

"I can't guess," Fallon confessed. "Helverson, my comrade, thinks that you are a goddess and he explains all so."

"Then you do not think I am a goddess?" she exclaimed, with mock indignation in her voice but with taunting humor in her eyes.

"I thought you were a goddess when you called down that blaze of lightning just now," Fallon admitted. "But right at this moment, you look like a girl, the most beautiful I've ever seen."

Brynhild looked up at him demurely. "Are there no fair girls in your outer world, then?"

Her brilliant blue eyes were provocative, challenging, more than a little amused and yet a little breathless too. The royal beauty of her perfect young face stood out in the darkness with that uncanny faint radiance that was inherent in her body.

The American's throat tightened with emotion. He had lost all awareness of time or place or of anything else except those wonderful eyes in which the little lightning-sparks were now all muffled by new softness. He told himself desperately that he was losing his head, that Brynhild was only flirting with him because he was new and different to her, that he must not—

His hand went out and touched her bare shoulder, unsteadily. The tingling energy that thrilled through him from that touch completed the demoralization of his will. Fallon's arms went around the daughter of Thor and he bent and kissed her parted red lips.

Fallon kissed the daughter of Thor

THE dizzily sweet shock of it set the blood roaring in his ears. He felt the torrent of golden hair against his cheek like soft flame. And Brynhild did not draw back from his clasp. When he breathlessly raised his head, she looked up at him with a strangely youthful and shy eagerness in her shining eyes.

"This is crazy," Fallon gasped. "I didn't mean to do it, but—"

"I am glad you did," Brynhild said softly. "Outlander, I was drawn to you when first I found you. But until tonight, I thought you a coward as we all did. I ask pardon for misjudging."

"You ask *my* pardon?" Fallon choked, still holding her. "It should be the other way around. I'm only a man, and you're a goddess or something near it—"

There was sudden interruption—a voice speaking in fierce anger.

They both turned. Old Tyr had

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come back up the stair and had emerged onto the dark, windy crest of the cliff to see them in each other's arms. The Aesir's chieftain's iron face was suddenly raging.

"You lying outland dog!" he spat at Fallon. "You dared lay your vile hands on the princess of the Aesir!"

"Tyr, be silent!" ordered Brynhild imperiously. "You know not what you are saying. "This outlander loves me, and you may as well learn now that I love him."

The frank avowal set Fallon's pulses racing wildly. But it seemed to increase the fury of Tyr to a point at which the chieftain's weathered face crimsoned.

"He loves you?" Tyr repeated furiously to the imperious daughter of Thor. "He has told you that? Now I see that it was well I came back up here to keep watch upon him."

The old Aesir levelled an accusing finger at Fallon. "He does not love you. He only seeks by professing love to influence you against becoming an ally of his enemies, the Germans. I overheard his comrade today, advising him to make love to you for that purpose!"

Appalled, Fallon suddenly remembered what until now he had entirely forgotten—Helverson's naive advice to make love to the Aesir princess.

And he remembered now too that Tyr had been close to them when the Norwegian had proffered that advice. It was only too evident that the old Aesir chieftain had overheard.

Brynhild saw that sudden dismay on Fallon's face, and her own white face stiffened.

"Is this true that Tyr tells me?" she asked the American with dangerous softness.

"Let him deny it if he can," Tyr bellowed.

Fallon's voice was hoarse. "It's true that Helverson said something foolish like that. But I paid no attention to him. Brynhild, you can't believe that I had that in mind just now—"

Brynhild's small hand flashed and the stinging slap stopped the words in Fallon's throat. He stared at her unbelievingly.

Wild anger blazed in the face of Thor's daughter. The little lightnings in her blue eyes flashed out ragingly. As though sensing its mistress' mood, the crouching white lynx sprang up and snarled horribly.

"I see that I did *not* misjudge you, and that the German was right!" flared Brynhild. "Coward you may not be, but false-hearted trickster you *are!*"

"Brynhild, listen!" he pleaded desperately, but the white-hot flame of her anger brooked no defense.

"Now I see that the German spoke the truth when he said that all your outland western nations are treacherous and evil!" she blazed. "Nations whose men hate honest war, and seek to gain their cause by whispering lying words of love."

She made a furious gesture. "Tyr, my decision is made. We Aesir ally ourselves to the Germans. They, at least, fight by clean war and battle and not by trickery. With them, we'll shatter the western peoples and all their evil!"

Fallon stepped forward, in frantic appeal. "Brynhild, you *can't* do that! If you let the Germans use your powers—"

A swordpoint pricking his back checked his advance, and the harsh voice of Tyr grated a question.

"Shall I kill the dog now, niece Brynhild?"

"No, he shall see the doom of his degenerate race begin, for his greater punishment," choked the raging daugh-

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ter of Thor. "He and his comrade shall ride forth with us when we Aesir go to join the Germans."

Her voice flared like a silver bugle. "Lock them up until then, Tyr. And send riders down the valley with orders to gather every warrior of the Aesir here at Valhalla tomorrow night. Tell them we go forth at last to war, that we ride forth then to join the Germans in the great battle for the outer world!"

CHAPTER VI

Wrath of a Goddess

DARKNESS was creeping again across the valley Asgard, like a slow, stealthy tide. During all the long day, there had been ceaseless bustle of feverish activity around Valhalla. The clang of hammers on weapons and armor, the excited shouts of hurrying men, the rattling hoofs of horsemen hastily coming and going, now faded into a tense silence with the coming of night.

Fallon looked sickly down from the narrow window at the swarms of tossing red torches in front of the castle. The torchlight glinted off the gleaming helmets and armor of hosts of horsemen who were gathering down there. There was something ominous and unnerving about the quietness of that warlike host.

His face was haggard as he turned to Helverson. The big Norwegian sat somberly in a corner of the locked room, his wrists bound behind him by hide thongs as Fallon's were. He did not raise his leonine yellow head as the American came toward him.

"We've got to *do* something!" Fallon exclaimed, his voice raw. "They're gathering down there now."

"There is nothing we can do," rumbled Helverson. "All now is in the hands of the Norns."

"Damn such fatalism!" raged Fallon. "If I'd killed Heysing as I intended, things would have been different. And even though I failed there, Brynhild still wouldn't have turned toward the Germans if it hadn't been for your cursed fool's advice that came to her ears—"

He stopped, suddenly. He looked shamefacedly at the somber, stolid Norwegian.

"I'm sorry, Nels—you know I didn't mean that," he muttered. "My nerve must be cracking."

"But we can't let Brynhild lead the Aesir out to join the Nazis," he repeated tautly. "It's not just the Aesir warriors I'm most fearful about, though their appearance will have a superstitious effect that may swing the whole north behind the Axis. It's Brynhild and her terrific powers over natural forces. I *saw* her call down storm and lightning, last night. If Hitler's men get the secret of powers like that—"

He left it unfinished, for his agonized mind had swung to his other and deeper torment.

"And she thinks that I made love to her only as a trick! I couldn't convince her that I do love her and always will, whether she is girl or goddess."

Helverson's thoughts had shifted, for the big Norwegian rumbled: "Many months must have passed in the outside world during the couple of days we've been in this valley. What has happened in the war out there during that time?"

BOTH men jumped to their feet as the lock of their door grated. Red torchlight spilled into the dusky room. Tyr and Heimdall, in full armor, entered with two warriors.

"Are you ready to ride, outlanders?" spat Tyr. "Are you ready to go forth with us and see us join the Germans

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to smash your lying race?"

"Tyr, let me talk with Brynhild," pleaded Fallon. "If she'll only listen to me—"

"She's listened to too many of your honeyed lies!" roared the old Aesir chieftain.

Tall Heimdall, glaring at the two comrades, added: "If we had had our way, you'd have been dead hours ago."

For a moment, Fallon's mind lit to a vague gleam of desperate hope. Perhaps the fact that Brynhild had prevented their deaths so far meant that despite her anger she had not completely conquered the love for him which she had admitted.

Then he saw the falsity of that hope. She was sparing them this long only that they might taste the bitterness of seeing the defeat and disaster of their country's forces.

Tyr shoved him roughly toward the door. "Get started, outland dog. The Aesir are ready now to ride."

Hands still bound behind them, Fallon and Helverson walked in heavy silence down the massive stairs ahead of their stalking escort. They emerged from Valhalla castle into cold, windy darkness splashed by the quivering light of many red torches.

Out here in the torchlit night, a great host of fierce-faced Aesir warriors in full armor silently sat their horses. The crimson rays glinted and gleamed from horned helmets and battered breastplates, from huge battle-axes and sword-hilts. A superhuman tension of expectation seemed brooding over the two thousand mounted men.

Thralls held the bridles of a score of unmounted horses. Fallon and the Norwegian were roughly thrust into the saddles of two of these steeds. Their hands were not unbound, and glaring Aesir warriors took the bridles of their horses to lead them.

At that moment, the tense silence of the great host was broken suddenly by a tremendous shout.

"The princess!" crashed the chorus of yelling voices.

Fallon twisted in the saddle. His heart thudded as he saw Brynhild striding lithely out of the castle into the torchlight. She wore the supple, glittering mail, but her pale golden head was unhelmed. Her light sword swung at her belt, and the white lynx loped beside her.

A little behind her came the sullen-eyed Thialfi, and the trim, handsome black figure of Victor Heysing. They were followed by the slim, mailed Valkyries.

Fallon's heart contracted with impotent rage at sight of the Nazi. Heysing showed no sign of ill effects from his wound now, and his pale eyes had a glitter of triumph in them.

"The princess! Homage to Thor's daughter!" crashed the shouts of the hosts, and a forest of swords and axes flashed up in salute.

Brynhild flung up her white hand in acknowledgment of that wild greeting. Her royal beauty was like a thing of leaping flame tonight. Her brilliant eyes swept the fierce host, ignoring Fallon.

"Lords and captains of the Aesir, this night we go forth again to that which you all have longed for—to war!" her voice rang. "Yes, to clean, honest war, man to man, sword to sword, a fair, fierce combat such as we knew and loved before we came to this valley.

"War! Good, clean war again!" yelled the eager host in fierce delight.

"Before this night passes, you shall know battle again," Brynhild promised. She gestured toward Victor Heysing. "This man tells me that the valiant Germans, who are to be our allies, are less than a night's ride from here."

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"It is true!" Heysing exclaimed loudly to the host. "I went forth from this valley just now, and communicated by certain means with an army of my countrymen that is not far from here."

FALLON understood. The Nazi had gone out of the valley to his plane in the gorge, and had used its radio to communicate with the nearest German forces.

Heysing's face was flaming with excitement. "I learned that almost two years have passed in the two of your days that I've been in this valley! And during that time, our German forces have conquered all the northland except for one large guerilla band that still resists.

"A German force is even now moving to attack that band. It and the British tricksters who have deluded it into resisting us are holding a coastal village on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, only some hours' ride from here through the mountains."

Brynhild's clear voice concluded. "We ride over the mountains to join that valiant German force in its attack! We shall be their allies henceforth against the traitorous outland peoples. This very night, we Aesir awake from sluggish peace and strike again in clean, manly war!"

Deafening roar of acclamation greeted her fierce promise. As it reverberated, the daughter of Thor vaulted lightly into the saddle of her black stallion. The others were mounting hastily too.

Fallon called desperately to her. "Brynhild, you must listen to me! This purpose upon which you start is evil! You have been tricked into it by lies—"

"*You* are the one who deals in tricks!" she flamed at him. "Now you go forth with us to see the fruits of your cunning treachery."

She spurred with her Valkyries, and Heysing and Thialfi, to the front of the great host. Her glittering mailed arm flashed up into the torchlight in signal.

"Lords of the Aesir, we ride!"

Trumpeters instantly sounded their brazen horns in a long, thrilling blast. The ground shook from the tread of thousands of hoofs. The Aesir host moved forward, fierce warriors galloping knee to knee as they streamed down the valley.

Fallon, jolting in the saddle as the mounts of himself and Helverson were led by their guards just behind the Valkyries, plumbed a nadir of black despair. And the same emotion throbbed in the hoarse voice of the Norwegian.

"Fallon, did you understand what the cursed German said?" cried Helverson over the roar of rushing hoofs. "It's 1942 by now out in our own world! The Nazis have conquered all Norway except the far northern wilderness, and now they've sent an army to conquer that!"

"And Brynhild's Aesir are riding to help the Nazis do that, and crush the last Norwegian guerillas," Fallon agonized.

"They *can't* do it," Helverson asserted dazedly. "Thor's daughter will surely never use her powers against us Norse."

But Fallon had no hope left. He had lost the game to Heysing, from first to last. The German riding ahead there was on his way to a supreme triumph. It would not be long before the Nazis would penetrate the secret of Brynhild's powers. Their scientists would come to this hidden valley, would pry into the cosmic forces focused here, and forge irresistible weapons.

And Hitler's lieutenants would find a way to dispose of Brynhild, once she

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had served their purpose. It was maddening—the thought of how she and her clean love of combat were about to be used as a tool against the embattled democracies.

THEY were riding on down the dark valley, in perfect silence except for the throbbing thunder of thousands of hoofs. It did not seem long to Fallon's overstrained nerves before they were approaching the western end of the valley.

Nothing was visible ahead except a wall of blankness in the dark. It was impossible to see out of this uncanny blind-spot. When Brynhild and her Valkyries, at the head of the host, vanished magically into that blankness, Fallon knew they had emerged into the outer world.

The weird blank barrier loomed in front of his own led horse. Tyr and Heimdall and all the other Aesir chieftains were riding fearlessly on. They reached the barrier. And as he passed through it, the American felt again that sharp, wrenching shock through every atom of his body.

He was outside Asgard valley—back again in his own world of faster time.

"It is winter again, out here," Helverson was muttering, staring incredulously. "*Two* winters, since we crashed here two days ago."

That was hard for Fallon to believe too, that two years could have passed out here. For the snowy white gorge looked just the same.

The sky overhead was ablaze with the brilliant winter stars. But already the first bars and banners of the Northern Lights were wheeling across the nighted heavens as Brynhild led her host of warriors in a rapid trot down the long gorge.

Fallon, looking up haggardly at that quickening dance of the aurora across the heavens, wondered fleetingly if it could be true that Brynhild called forth those spectral lights to illuminate their way. He had little room to doubt it, knowing her mastery of storm and sky.

For hours, the Aesir host moved through the snowy mountains. Brynhild led the way ever northward, through gorges and narrow passes. They were close, Fallon knew, to the Norwegian villages on the wild Arctic coast which he himself had been making for when his plane crashed.

In silence that had a quality of gathering fierce tension, the warriors of Asgard urged their mounts over the ranges in the teeth of a bitter wind. At last the daughter of Thor halted their host beneath the slope of a last, long snowy ridge.

"Just over this ridge lies the coastland where we shall join the Germans!" she called. "Now give your horses breathing and see to your swords and axes, for soon we clash blades with our enemies."

The blazing excitement in her eyes was reflected by the fierce battle-light in the faces of all the Aesir host.

Fallon tried despairing final appeal. "Brynhild, you can't do this thing—"

He was interrupted. Heimdall had been alertly listening and now uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Listen! There is battle now over the ridge!"

DIMLY to their ears there came dull roar of distant explosions, and a lurid red light paled the aurora just north of the ridge.

Victor Heysing shouted exultantly. "It is my German comrades whom we came to join! Already they are attacking the enemy down there!"

"Then we wait here no longer!" flared Brynhild's silver voice. "Up to the ridge, men of the Aesir! We ride

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into battle."

"We follow, princess!" came Tyr's deep, eager shout. "Oh, that your father Thor were with us as again we sweep to war!"

Up the snowy slope spurred the whole great host, led by Brynhild's slim, shining figure and the loping lynx. And the wild war lust of the Aesir thousands broke forth in ringing battle-cries.

Fallon, gripping the saddle with his knees as his own mount was swept along by his guards, saw that Nels Helverson's face was crimson with emotion. The big Norwegian was making mad efforts to burst his bonds, as he heard the roar of battle from over the ridge.

"My countrymen and yours are fighting over there!" he cried hoarsely to Fallon. "I will fight and die with them if I can get free, even against Thor's daughter and the Aesir!"

Spread out in a long mass, the excited Aesir host reached the flattened crest of this last ridge. And there they suddenly stopped.

Brynhild had abruptly drawn rein, and so had all her fierce followers. They seemed stricken into stupefaction by the spectacle which lay before them, and whose ear-splitting uproar now clearly reached them.

Fallon, close behind her, saw the blazing excitement fade from the face of Thor's daughter. He saw it replaced by a stunned, bewildered expression.

"Why, what is this that takes place?" she exclaimed bewilderedly.

Under the Northern Lights, the scene before them was appalling. From the ridge on which they sat their horses, the snowy terrain sloped downward for two miles to the ice-fringed shore of the heaving black Arctic Ocean. Out on the sea, two small steamers were struggling bravely through the ice toward the docks of the little village on the shore.

Half the wooden houses in that Norwegian village were burning fiercely. Dive-bombers with the black swastika on their wings were swooping continually down through that lurid glare, and the shattering explosion of bombs was constant. Gouts of bursting flame seemed to engulf houses, streets, and women and children who were fleeing toward the docks.

The land side of the village was protected by low barricades of frozen earth. Behind those flimsy defenses, scattered handfuls of men with rifles were resisting the advance of a mass of several thousand Nazi infantry pressing toward them from the west. The Nazis were preceded by light tanks that already were riding roughshod over the barricades.

"What is this that we see?" exclaimed Brynhild again, seeming stunned like her followers by the hellish uproar.

"It is my countrymen who attack!" cried Victor Heysing triumphantly. "Look, they seek to conquer before those British ships can reach the harbor to take the defenders away. This is how we Germans make war."

"But *this* is not war!" burst out Brynhild. "Not clean, man-to-man war by sword and spear in equal combat, such as we Aesir knew and loved! This is a massacre by machines of iron and fire!"

A DAZED cry of agreement rose from her stunned Viking followers all along the ridge.

Tyr's iron-like face was raging as he watched. "Why, these Germans are not warriors! They are butchers who slay women and children by dropping flame upon them from the sky."

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"And those whom they massacre are of our own Norse blood!" cried Heimdall furiously. "The German said that his countrymen sought only to protect the Norse."

Brynhild's face was a white flame of anger and loathing. "We Aesir will never ally ourselves with a race who fight like that!"

She swung toward Fallon. "*Now* I understand at last why you said you hated war. This war *is* hateful, and so are those who unloose it upon the world."

She spurred close, and her dagger flashed and cut the bonds of the American and Norwegian. Her blue eyes appealed to Fallon.

"Outlander, I beg forgiveness! You spoke truth from first to last. It was the German who lied—"

She swung back suddenly, her voice flaring. "Where *is* the German? Seize that lying plotter!"

The mounted Aesir warriors milled upon the snowy ridge in a confusion of swift searching.

"The cursed German is gone!" yelled Tyr. "He must have seen the way the wind was blowing, and slipped back down over the ridge. And Thialfi is gone too."

"Find and seize them!" cried Thor's daughter. "If Thialfi has turned traitor and deserter—"

But the Aesir warriors who rode furiously back down behind the ridge soon returned—with Thialfi, but not with Heysing.

Loki's son was dying. A gaping slash in his throat bubbled horribly as he looked up at them from the snow in which they had laid him, and tried to speak.

"The German—slipped away from beside me when he saw your horror and rage," Thialfi choked to the princess. "I galloped after to halt him—but he turned and pretended surrender, then struck suddenly with a dagger—"

Thialfi's head rolled slack. Whatever else he had been, Loki's son had been no traitor.

Fallon saw white, terrible rage gather in Brynhild's face and stormy eyes. And that rage was reflected in the faces of all the Aesir.

"Look!" shouted Heimdall, pointing down toward the roaring battle by the village. "The Germans come toward *us!*"

IT WAS true. The advancing Nazi force had suddenly wheeled away from the barricades it had been attacking, and was starting up the slope toward the crest on which the Aesir horsemen were.

The tanks already led the way, rumbling up the snowy slope with their snouted guns swung forward ready for action. Behind them came the masses of the infantry, in quick, rapid march.

Fallon understood instantly. "Heysing escaped to them and told them of our presence here! They're after *you*, Brynhild. If they can capture or kill you and shatter your Aesir, Heysing knows they can invade your valley and gain the key to great powers there."

"That's been the lying devil's plan all along!" cried Helverson.

A cry of rage went up from the Aesir host as all understood the duplicity with which Heysing had planned to trick them.

"They would invade Asgard, would they?" roared Tyr. He flashed his heavy sword in the air. "It seems that we shall have the fighting we hoped for, after all."

Brynhild's blue eyes were blazing. Her voice rang along the raging host on the ridge.

"From henceforth, the German butchers are our blood-enemies and the

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Norse and their allies our friends. Make ready, children of Asgard, for the battle is near."

Wild shouts of exultation answered her. Swords and axes flashed out in readiness. Helverson had secured Thialfi's axe, and handed the dead man's sword to Fallon.

"Brynhild, what are you going to do?" cried Fallon to the daughter of Thor. "You can't stand against those Germans. No matter how brave your warriors, swords and axes are no good against planes and tanks and guns!"

The Nazi forces were already streaming up the lower slopes. The tanks rumbling ahead in the snow would be spitting death from their machine-guns within a few minutes. They and the automatic-riflemen behind them were almost within range.

And the dive-bombers that had been attacking the burning village had turned from it and were banking around in answer to radio commands. Those planes, Fallon knew, would quickly spot the Aesir host and come down upon it.

Brynhild answered Fallon's expostulation with a ringing laugh. "I tell you that despite their machines of iron, we shall shatter them this night. Now keep back from me, and await my signal."

Thor's daughter rode forward, out onto a little promontory of the snowy ridge. Her slim mailed figure and unhelmed head were silhouetted against the wild glare of burning village and flaring Northern Lights.

SHE raised her hands toward the sky in a fierce gesture. The Nazis charging up the slope had glimpsed her, and the machine-guns of their rushing tanks spat a hail of missiles toward her. But Brynhild remained unmoving upon her steed, hands still reaching upward.

Fallon felt a great throb of fear as he saw the distant Nazi planes now roaring toward them. In a few moments, those planes would be overhead and would be diving to release their bombs and shatter the Aesir host before tanks and gunners arrived. In a few moments the girl he loved beyond life would be blasted—

The flaring sky suddenly darkened. Clouds like vast black wings closed down upon a moaning wind to blot out the aurora's rays.

"It is the storm-magic," muttered Tyr in a voice suddenly hoarse. "See—"

Fallon felt the hackles rising on his neck. Those vast black cloud-wings that had appeared so suddenly were sweeping with incredible swiftness lower and lower toward the crest of this ridge.

The moaning wind was rising to a whistling, screaming gale that smote from overhead toward the north. The throbbing planes out there were batted like leaves by the raging tempest.

"I am afraid, Fallon," husked Helverson, his eyes dilated in the ghastly dusk. "It is the wrath of the goddess—"

Heaven and earth leaped into blinding light as titanic bolts of lightning seared down out of the descending blackness. The lambent, gleaming figure of Brynhild was revealed, wild hands still raised skyward.

The American glimpsed those dazzling lightning-bolts hitting the rumbling tanks down on the slope, fusing them to scorched metal. He saw the masses of Nazi infantry pause confusedly.

"The hammer of Thor's magic power falls upon them!" yelled Heimdall. "Make ready, comrades!"

Unceasing detonations of thunder

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rolled across the blackened sky. Torrents of raging hail were sweeping the lower slopes, and still the dancing brands of lightning struck and struck down there.

Fallon saw the struggling Nazi planes swept from the sky by that appalling storm. Continuous sheeted flares of lightning showed the German troops milling wildly down there in the snow. Out of the infernal tempest, Brynhild appeared suddenly at his side.

She was goddess indeed, now—her figure shining with that eery lambency and her wild white face transfigured in the lightning.

"Sons of the Aesir, *we ride!*" stabbed her silvery voice.

Three thousand voices crashed answer through the thunderous din, and the trumpets clamored as the yelling host spurred forward.

Fallon felt lifted out of himself by superhuman emotion as he galloped beside Brynhild down the snowy slope toward the milling enemy. He heard the blood-chilling, squalling scream of the white lynx as it leaped ahead of the racing steed of Thor's daughter.

HIS sword was in his hand and he was leaning far out over the neck of his mount as they rushed down through the lightning and hail and darkness. And over all the uproar rose the stabbing cry of Brynhild and the Valkyries.

"Yo to ho!"

They smashed down into the hosts of Nazi infantry like a thunderbolt. Fallon, seeking to spur ahead of Brynhild for her protection, glimpsed scared, desperate German faces and striking bayonets everywhere.

He hacked furiously down with his sword at men who sought to swing up their rifles to shoot. He saw Nazi soldiers recoiling with screams of horror from the leaping white lynx, and glimpsed Tyr shouting fiercely as he struck. And close by in the press, Helverson rode and whirled his heavy axe, blood-mad with heat of battle.

But try as he might, Fallon could not spur ahead of Brynhild. The slim sword of the daughter of Thor leaped in blurringly swift and deadly stabs. And always, it seemed, the sheeted lightning struck just ahead of her galloping horse, and advanced with her.

Out of the phantasmagoric, lightning-lit battle, a furious and wofish face rushed toward Fallon. All Victor Heysing's handsomeness was gone as he came riding toward the American with a levelled automatic spitting fire from his hand.

Fallon felt the tug of the bullets at his jacket and through the uproar heard Heysing's raging shout.

"Gott, I'll at least take you—"

Lightning rocked the crazy scene as Fallon spurred into the spitting pistol with his sword extended straight toward the German.

He felt the stinging sear of one bullet along his thigh, and then his outstretched blade tore into Heysing's body and he felt its hilt smack hard against the German's ribs. The onward rush of his steed tore loose his sword, and he looked back to see the Nazi fall from the saddle.

The Nazi troops were everywhere fleeing in confusion, now. And after them rode the raging Aesir warriors. Within the half hour, it was all over. The storm was muttering away, and Fallon was almost glad that darkness veiled the scattered hosts of German dead on the snowy slope.

He sat his horse beside Brynhild on the crest as the Aesir host re-gathered and came riding back up the slope. A wild shout crashed from them as they raised red swords and axes in salute

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to Thor's daughter.

"Homage, princess! Thanks to your storm-magic, we have left no German living here!"

"Aye, but there are others of the butchers in the northland," Brynhild reminded them. "And now we Aesir shall not rest until they are driven back from whence they came. We shall ride forth again and again from our valley and strike them wherever we find them, until the land is clean of them."

"We hear and we will follow you, princess!" came the fierce answer.

"And *I will follow you, if you let me,*" Helverson rumbled, his face flaming.

BUT Fallon was silent. And Brynhild looked at him in sudden anxious earnestness. "I know that you come with us, too."

He shook his head heavily, and pointed down at the distant village where the two ships had now reached dock and were embarking the refugees.

"Those ships go to England, Brynhild," he said slowly. "And I must go with them."

"But you cannot!" she cried. Her brilliant eyes burned into his. "Outlander, you know that I love you. Even when I was angry for what I thought your deception, I still loved you and was sure that you loved me."

He leaned in the saddle to put his arms close around her and to feel the thrilling contact of her lips.

"Girl or goddess, I do love you, Brynhild," he said hoarsely. "But I swore an oath of duty that I must keep. I must go back to England to take up again my part in the war in the sky."

Her white face yearned toward him. "But you will come back, Outlander?"

"I'll come back, Brynhild. Nothing can keep me from coming back."

Fallon stood at the rail of the crowded little British freighter as it and its sister ship struggled doggedly out through the ice to open sea. He stood looking back achingly at the wilderness of snowy mountains that stretched awesome and forbidding beyond the shore.

The joyful Norwegian refugees who crowded the deck behind him were still excitedly discussing the mystery of their salvation. All they knew was that some terrific battle had taken place on the distant slopes which had destroyed the Nazis who had been on the point of conquering them. Storm had veiled that battle, and the mystery of their saviors' identity was unsolved.

"They must have been a large force of Norwegian guerillas, who went back into the mountains after they destroyed the Nazis," said a man.

A tall Norse woman, her eyes glowing with a strange light, shook her head.

"They were the old gods, come back from Asgard to help our people. Only Thor or his daughter could have blasted the invaders by storm like that."

Fallon, in the months to follow, was to hear that half-eager, half-doubtful assertion time and again, in the strange stories that were to drift out of embattled Norway.

Stories were to come of the old gods reappearing to aid their invaded land, of the mighty Aesir coming down again and again in night and storm in raids upon German posts; stories of the mystification and anger and fear of the Nazis, of the whisper of hope running through that northern land that Thor's daughter and her Valkyries were riding again, a whisper and hope that would keep Norway's people fighting until the tyrants could be overthrown.

Some day, Fallon knew, that overthrow would come. And some day, he would come back again to that wild, weird northern land, and would ride up into the mountains to the valley where the daughter of Thor would be waiting.

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Tink Takes Command

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

American soldiers were in Ireland, homesick and unhappy. Tink and Jing, little leprichaun fairy-creatures, decided to do something to cheer them up. But Nastee threw a monkey wrench into things.

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The two, Tink and Nastee, ran for the bushes

THE SKY above Central Park was an azure canopy dotted with the white puffs of vagrant clouds. The air was as intoxicating as rare wine. In short, Nature was in one of her most benign and delightful moods. Everything was glorious.

Tink sighed contentedly and closed his eyes. He was lying in the comfortable cup of a soft green leaf completely at peace with himself and creation.

Tink's tranquillity could be traced to circumstances other than the balmy weather. For one thing he was rid of Nastee, his incorrigibly troublesome companion, for a while at least. And that was a distinct relief.

But there was another thing that gladdened Tink's heart even more than Nastee's blessed absence. And that was the presence of Jing, the tiny, exquisite leprichaun-girl whom he'd met a few weeks before.

He opened his eyes lazily and looked up at her. She was sitting on a toadstool swinging her legs and humming softly. As always he was struck with the piquant allure of her delicate, gracefully molded features and the slim lines of her body that seemed made for flowing, dancing motion.

She shook her long blonde curls and stretched luxuriously. Then, with a lithe motion, she sprang to her feet and pirouetted brilliantly.

"Isn't it wonderful," she cried.

"What is?" Tink asked.

"Oh, just everything. The weather, the sky, the clouds, everything."

"You forgot to mention one other thing that's wonderful," Tink said.

"What?"

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A chuckle bubbled from Tink.

"The fact that Nastee isn't around causing trouble is pretty wonderful, I think."

"Where is he?" Jing asked. "You told me, but I forgot."

"He got homesick and went back to Ireland for a vacation," Tink explained. "Maybe he'll decide to stay there for good, but that's too much to hope for."

Jing sat down again and frowned.

"How did he get to Ireland?" she asked.

"He stowed away on a troop ship. He reached the County Down a few weeks ago. His home village is just a few miles from where the American soldiers have built their camp."

"That isn't far from Belfast, is it?" Jing asked. There was a troubled look in her eyes.

Tink noticed the expression. "Not very far," he answered. "Why? Is something wrong?"

"I don't know," Jing answered. "Maybe I'm just being silly, but something in this morning's paper has me worried. I didn't think about it at the time, but now—"

"Now, what?" Tink demanded. "Has it got something to do with Nastee?"

"It might have," said Jing. "Maybe you'd better look into it. There's a morning paper over on that park bench. You'd better read the article."

"All right," said Tink, "I will."

HE STOOD up and Jing jumped to the ground beside him, then the two of them skipped across the grass to the park bench. Tink swung himself up by using the braces as a trapeze artist might, but Jing leaped to the seat with one graceful bound.

When Tink swung himself over the edge of the bench Jing had already found the article in the paper. She pointed to it, as Tink reached her side, panting from his exertion.

"There," she said, "what do you make of that?"

Tink frowned and began reading. The story was datelined BELFAST. It was headed:

FRICTION SEEN DEVELOPING BETWEEN A.E.F. AND NATIVES OF IRISH STATE

(Belfast)

Captain James Donavon of the American forces in Ulster, today issued an order confining his men to their barracks for the duration of their stay in Northern Ireland. The village of Ballycree which is the nearest village to the American camp has been ruled "out of bounds" for the American soldiers. No explanation was given for this drastic action, but reliable observers are of the opinion that it will place a strain on American relations with Ulster. Captain Donavon refused to issue a statement to the Press. This is the first instance of friction between American soldiers and natives of Northern Ireland, all having been peaceful and serene until this time. . . .

Tink read the dispatch twice, and he was scowling worriedly when he looked up at Jing.

"Are you thinking what I am?" asked Jing.

"I'm afraid so," Tink said despairingly. "Ballycree is Nastee's home village. I'll bet anything he's at the bottom of the trouble that's brewing there."

"But how could he be," Jing protested. "It just doesn't seem possible that he could cause that much trouble."

"You don't know Nastee," Tink said gloomily.

"But," Jing said, "what could he do

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to disrupt everything that way? And why would he want to make the soldiers mad at the people of Ireland?"

"No reason," Tink said. "But he lives to stir up trouble, and I've got an awful suspicion that he's behind this mess. This is terrible."

"What are you going to do?" asked Jing.

Tink sat down and put his chin in his hands.

"There's only one patriotic thing I can do," he said.

"You mean—"

Tink nodded. "I've got to go to Ireland and stop Nastee. He's getting too big for his britches. I'll have to leave right away before things get any worse."

"Will you wait for a troop ship?" Jing asked.

Tink shook his head firmly. "Nope. Haven't got time."

"What then?"

"I can get a bomber from Mitchell Field and be in Ireland in twenty-four hours. It's the only thing to do."

JING clapped her hands and pirouetted gaily.

"Oh, won't that be fun!" she cried. "I've never been in a plane."

Tink looked at her, startled.

"Who said you were coming along?" he demanded.

"I did," Jing said sweetly.

Tink decided that it was time to put his foot down.

"No," he said firmly, "you aren't coming. It—it might be dangerous."

"I don't care. I'm coming."

Tink put his hands on his hips.

"For the last time, no! You absolutely aren't coming."

* * *

THE huge, American bomber landed smoothly and came to a stop within a hundred feet. When the pilots and radiomen crawled out and dropped to the ground, Tink said:

"Here we are, but I still don't think you should have come."

Jing grinned at him. "Maybe I can help you with Nastee. Anyway, I won't be any trouble."

The two leprichauns swung down from the plane then and headed for the green, sunshiny Irish countryside—and the village of Ballycree.

It only took them an hour to reach the small, picturesque, sea-side village at which the first contingent of American troops had landed. The camp where the bulk of the soldiers were bivouacked was situated several miles from the village. A winding dusty road led from the village to the camp, but when Tink and Jing arrived it was free from any travellers and there was not a sign of a soldier in any of the village streets or, what was worse, in any of the town's numerous friendly bars.

Tink shook his head sadly as he viewed the cheerless, empty village. The townspeople walked the streets grim and unsmiling; even the children seemed oppressed by the lowering gloom that shrouded the village.

"Goodness, this is terrible," Jing said anxiously. "Everybody looks so unhappy that it's making me feel blue. You just have to do something about this, Tink."

"We'd better go up to the camp," Tink said. "Maybe we can find out something there." He shook his head worriedly. "This thing looks bad."

At the camp they found the same gloomy atmosphere. Soldiers stood about in groups of three and four, saying little, doing nothing. There was a general air of discontent and grumpiness evident.

"Oh, what are you going to do," Jing almost wailed. "I just can't bear the sight of all these unhappy soldiers."

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Tink patted her shoulder. "Don't worry. I'll think of something, but first of all I think we ought to see this Captain James Donavon who gave the order that confined these men to camp. We may be able to find out something from him."

They easily located the officer's tent and slipped through the flap into its clean, well-ordered interior. At a desk in the center of the tent sat a tall, black-haired young man, with light blue eyes and a square, determined jaw. He would have been handsome if it weren't for the black scowl that was stamped on his features. He wore the uniform and insignia of a Captain.

"I think this is our man," Tink whispered.

"I wonder what he's so mad about," Jing said, regarding the young Captain with interest.

Tink frowned. "I think we'll have to find that out from Nastee."

The flap of the tent opened then and an orderly entered and saluted.

"Excuse me, sir, but I think it only my duty to report that the men are becoming very restless and discontented. They're doing a lot of talking, sir."

CAPTAIN JAMES DONAVON tapped a pencil impatiently against the desk.

"Well, let them talk," he snapped. "I'm giving the orders and I want them obeyed. I want none of my men associating with those crazy, unreasonable, hot-tempered villagers." The Captain stared moodily at the surface of his desk. "That's final."

"But, sir," the orderly persisted, "our boys and the village people have been getting on splendidly. There hasn't been one bit of trouble."

"Then I'm making sure that there won't be any," the Captain said. His eyes were miserable and unhappy as he stood up and snapped.

"I don't want to hear anymore about this, do you understand?"

The orderly shifted uncomfortably.

"I understand, sir. And you, yourself, won't be going into the village, either?"

"No!" Captain Donavon exploded. "I never want to see the place again."

"Well, sir, do you want me to pick up your belongings from Mayor McCarthy's home? I stowed a lot of your gear there as you were billeted with the McCarthy's when we first arrived."

Captain Donavon clenched his fists and jammed them into his trouser pockets.

"Don't mention the name of McCarthy in my presence," he barked.

The orderly backed toward the tent flap.

"I didn't mean to irritate you, sir," he said worriedly. "I didn't know you had anything against the Mayor. In fact, since you was so friendly with his daughter, Eileen, I kinda figured—"

"Get out!" Captain Donavon bellowed.

"But—"

"Get out!"

The orderly ducked through the tent flap, white-faced, and the Captain slumped behind the desk, his features grim and miserable.

"What a nasty man," Jing said. She made a face at the young Captain and stuck out her tongue at him.

Tink was leaning against the leg of a camp stool, his forehead furrowed with worried lines.

"That won't help any, he can't see you," he said abstractedly.

"I know, but it makes me feel better."

Tink sighed. "We've got a big job ahead of us. Nastee has quite a head start on us. I guess we'd better look

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him up first."

"How can you find him?"

Tink said, "follow me."

HE LED the way out of the Captain's tent. In the cleared area enclosed by the soldier's barracks he paused. When he noticed several men strolling into one particular tent, he nodded at Jing to follow him and started in that direction.

"Dice game," he explained.

"What do you mean?" asked Jing.

"Well, it's a good bet that those men are getting together to play craps. And Nastee loves to start trouble by kicking the dice around and spoiling things in general. It's an old trick of his. So if there's a crap game going, it's a cinch Nastee'll be around."

Tink was proven right on two counts. There *was* a crap game going and Nastee was on hand. Tink saw him the second he crawled under the tent-flap.

Nastee was in the center of the ring formed by the gambling soldiers, his sharp little face twisted in a malicious smile. He had obviously already caused a great deal of consternation for there were angry rumblings from the gambling soldiers.

But with Tink's arrival Nastee's fun was over. He saw Tink and the mischievous smile faded from his face. It was replaced by an almost comical look of startled consternation.

"W— when did you get here?" he said weakly.

"Never mind that," Tink said sternly. "I want to talk to you."

Dumbfounded by Tink's unexpected arrival, Nastee allowed himself to be led from the tent where Jing was waiting.

"Oh, you're here too," he said sulkily, when he saw the Leprichaun-girl.

"What have you been up to?" Tink demanded. "I know you're at the bottom of this trouble."

A sly evasive smile plucked at Nastee's lips.

"What trouble?" he smirked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes, you do," Tink said grimly. "What have you done to Captain Donavon?"

Nastee grinned and stretched out on the ground, cushioning his back against a soft blade of grass.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

Tink turned despairingly to Jing.

"We *were* right," he said. "Nastee is behind this trouble."

Nastee started to laugh, a thin, piping laugh that shook his whole frame. He rolled on his side, hands clasped over his belly, laughing uncontrollably.

"This is one mess you'll never straighten out," he said, between gasps of laughter.

Jing regarded his convulsed form with frosty anger. Her small foot tapped the ground in helpless exasperation.

"I think you're just terrible to cause all this trouble," she said stormily.

Nastee continued to giggle.

"You don't even know what happened," he said.

A SPECULATIVE gleam appeared in Tink's eyes. He remembered something the young Captain had said.

"I think I do," he said. "I should have thought of it before this. I'll bet Mayor McCarthy and his daughter, Eileen, are mixed up some way. I'll bet you've caused some mix-up between the Captain and Eileen. It's just the kind of thing you'd like to do."

"You're just guessing," Nastee jeered, but there was a sudden worried

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expression lurking in his sly eyes.

Tink noticed the expression and smiled.

"I was right," he said, snapping his fingers. "Come on, Jing, we've got work to do."

"Go ahead," Nastee said grouchily, "but it won't do you any good."

Tink took Jing by the hand and they skipped across the camp ground to the Captain's tent. Jing was red-cheeked with excitement.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded breathlessly. "Can I help?"

"You certainly can," Tink answered. "We've got to work on the Captain and this Eileen McCarthy, whoever she is. I'll take the Captain, but you'll have to handle the girl. You can find her in the Village easy enough."

Jing clapped her hands excitedly.

"That will be wonderful," she cried. "But what will I do?"

"Just use your feminine intuition and trust to luck," Tink replied. "I'll go to work on the Captain and then I'll meet you about dusk at the camp gate and we can compare notes."

"Oh, this will be fun!" Jing cried. With a bright smile she flashed away in a series of brilliant pirouettes . . .

Tink watched Jing until she was out of sight, then he hurried to Captain Donavon's tent. He found the young officer seated at his desk, head buried in his hands.

Tink's sympathetic nature was touched by the spectacle of the young man's unhappiness. He felt more anxious than ever to undo the misery Nastee had, somehow, caused.

But until he found out the facts of the case there was little he could do. With this in mind he scaled the telephone cord to the top of the Captain's desk and seated himself comfortably on top of a marble paper weight.

He put his chin in his hands and studied the Captain carefully. The young officer had lifted his head from the desk and was staring miserably at a small framed snapshot next to the ink-well.

Tink noticed the lines of pain and worry that interlaced around the young man's eyes, and he noticed the sorrowful expression in his clear blue eyes, but he also saw the hard determined angle of the officer's square jaw.

Tink then turned his attention to the snapshot. And the girl pictured in the snapshot was well worth anyone's attention. She was young and fair, with an impish sparkle in her lovely blue eyes. Her lips were curved in a smile that illumined her features with a breath-taking radiance. Hair the color and sheen of ripe blackberries fell to her shoulders in two silken-smooth braids, lending an old-fashioned dignity to her charming vivacity.

Tink sighed. She was lovely, that's all there was to it.

THE Captain picked up the snapshot of the dark-haired girl, studied it for a moment, then crumpled it in his fist and dropped it to the floor.

His lips were twisted and bitter.

"And I loved her so," he muttered savagely.

Tink found his sympathies allied with the young Captain. He was obviously a clean-cut, personable young man, and the girl in the snapshot—Eileen McCarthy, probably—had apparently thrown him over because of Nastee's machinations.

Her actions, he was sure, were completely unjustified. For the remainder of the afternoon Tink stayed close to Captain Donavon and his liking for the young officer grew with each passing hour.

When the slanting rays of the sun

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were fading to a dull crimson glow, he left the tent and hurried to the camp gate to meet Jing. Maybe she had learned something from her visit to the village that would be helpful in unsnarling this problem.

She was waiting for him, tapping her foot impatiently against the ground. He noticed that her customary smile was not in evidence.

"What did you find out?" he asked.

"Men!" she said. She wrinkled her nose in faint distaste. "I guess they're all alike. That poor girl!"

Tink stared at her, puzzled.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Plenty," Jing answered cryptically. "But perhaps you'd better tell me what you learned first."

For no good reason Tink began to feel faintly uneasy.

"I didn't find out much," he said. "The Captain is a swell fellow, clean, upright, honorable, and this McCarthy girl is a fool if she let anything Nastee did change her mind about him. That's all I found out."

"Oh," Jing said, "that's your opinion of him, is it? Well. I think you should know that your precious Captain is nothing but a—a beast, that's what he is."

"You can't be serious," Tink said, dazed by her vehemence.

"I was never more serious in my life," Jing said firmly. "Your Captain Donavon is an unscrupulous, dishonorable ogre."

Tink shook his head unbelievingly.

"You're just being silly," he said. "You're acting just like a woman. I don't care what you think the Captain's done, I still think he's all right."

Jing's eyes were as frosty as the points of icicles.

"So you don't care what he's done?"

"No," Tink said stubbornly, "I don't."

"Well," Jing said frostily, "I'm certainly glad I found out this side of your character.

"For heaven's sake, what's he done?" Tink said in sudden alarm.

"Oh, nothing much, according to your standards," Jing said coldly. "He merely happens to be a married man with a wife and five children in the United States, that's all."

Tink felt suddenly weak.

"But in spite of that," Jing went on, "he wanted this sweet girl to marry him. I suppose, though, you think that's all right."

Tink swallowed with an effort. He felt dizzy.

"How do you know?" he managed to ask.

"I saw a letter written to him by his wife. Full of 'dears' and 'darlings' and information about his five children. And," Jing added darkly, "a hint about his sixth."

"Sixth!" Tink echoed hollowly.

"Yes," Jing snapped, "and all the while he was leading this poor girl on with sweet talk and proposals. It's a good thing she discovered the letter on top of his bureau. He was billeted at her father's home, and while she was cleaning up his room she found this letter. It almost broke her heart, poor thing. When he came back that night she sent him packing. And good riddance. Her father wanted to take after him with a gun, and most of the villagers feel the same way. And *you* think he's wonderful!"

AFTER his first shock Tink's nimble mind began to function rapidly. Something was wrong!

"I'll bet Nastee had something to do with that letter," he said excitedly.

"Maybe he did," said Jing. "And more power to him. He's prevented a terrible injustice and I think he de-

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serves a vote of thanks."

"But," Tink said, "if the letter hadn't been discovered everything would have been all right."

The words had hardly passed his lips before he realized his mistake.

"I didn't mean," he began a desperate explanation but Jing cut him short.

"Oh everything would have been all right, would it?" she blazed. "Just as long as he wasn't found out, everything would have been ducky. Married, with five, maybe six children by this time, and *you* think it's all right for him to make love to every girl he meets—as long as he doesn't get caught."

"I didn't mean that exactly," Tink said desperately. "I only meant—"

"I know precisely what you meant," Jing said, and her voice was as frigid as an Arctic storm. She turned on her heel and marched away, her chin high in the air.

Tink stared after her erect, departing back, stunned and miserable. This was something he had never expected.

With a heavy sigh he slouched moodily back to the camp, his thoughts dark and unhappy. Jing had deserted him and the Captain had five children, maybe six, and everything was in a magnificent muddle.

And Tink didn't give a damn!

His bitterness was a result of his realization that he had reached the nadir of his existence; things couldn't be blacker; his cup of woe was slopping over and the situation couldn't get worse.

In that he was mistaken!

A half hour later, still slouching despairingly about the camp, he met Nastee.

Nastee's sly little face was twisted with a gloating smile, and he was almost dancing in his glee. Tink was too miserably preoccupied to notice these ominous symptoms.

"Too bad, too bad," Nastee chortled, "but it's a case of the best man winning. I always knew she liked me, but I hardly thought she'd throw you over like this."

"Like what?" Tink said stupidly. "What are you talking about?"

"Your girl," Nastee said, grinning widely.

"What about her?" Tink demanded.

Nastee smirked smugly.

"There's a party in the glen tonight. She wants me to go with her. I knew she'd get tired of you sooner or later."

Tink listened incredulously, a sick empty feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"I don't believe you," he gasped weakly.

"Come along and see," Nastee said with a challenging smirk. "I'm meeting her at the camp gate."

With a mounting premonition of impending disaster Tink followed Nastee to the camp gate and there he realized that Nastee was not lying.

Jing *was* waiting for him!

She was smiling brightly at Nastee, ignoring Tink completely.

"I'm glad you could come," she said warmly.

Nastee smirked at Tink and took her by the arm.

"Let's go," he said.

They left, arm-in-arm, smiling.

Tink groaned, watching them depart, Jing's disloyalty left him stunned and hopelessly miserable. With slumping shoulders and a deep distrust in all womankind, he returned to the camp.

Night came and he fell into a despairing slumber, resolved to return to America as soon as possible. . . .

WHEN he was awakened from a fitful slumber some hours later by a hand shaking his shoulder, he was still truculent and cynical.

"Wake up!" a voice said urgently.

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"There's no time to waste."

He opened his eyes, looked up and saw Jing standing over him, a faint flush of excitement coloring her exquisite features.

"You!" Tink said. He struggled to a sitting position. "You—Brutus," he said moodily.

"Don't be melodramatic," Jing said. "I only went out with Nastee to see if he'd spill something."

"Ha!" Tink said bleakly.

"For heaven's sake," Jing said, a faint annoyance creeping into her tone, "stop acting like the second act of a bad play. I'll admit I was mad at you for a while, but then I remembered what you said about Nastee being at the bottom of the trouble between the Captain and the Irish colleen, and I decided to investigate."

Tink still felt injured but his curiosity got the better of him.

"And what did you find out?" he asked.

Jing smiled triumphantly.

"Nastee is responsible for the trouble," she announced. "When we got to the glen he started bragging about how much smarter he is than you."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Tink said.

"Yes he did. He made out a pretty good case for himself too." Jing giggled. "Then he found a beer bottle with a few drops left, so he crawled in and finished them up. He got so drunk he could hardly get back out of the bottle. I had to pull him out by the hair of his head."

"Sounds like everybody had a fine time," Tink said with a sad sigh.

"Don't be silly," Jing said crisply. "When he got out of the bottle he told me the whole story of how he broke up the Captain's romance with Eileen McCarthy. Then he passed out under a toadstool. I hurried right here to tell you."

In spite of his hurt feelings Tink found his interest quickening.

"And what did Nastee do?" he demanded.

"It's simply a case of mistaken identity," Jing said. "I'll tell you the whole story and you can decide what to do." . . .

When she finished Tink leaped to his feet.

"I should have suspected something like this. Now let's get this straight. There are two James Donavons in camp. One a private, and the other the Captain. Nastee found some of the private's mail, planted it on the Captain —Oh, how simple it must have been!"

"What can we do to help?" Jing asked anxiously. "She's such a lovely girl it would be a shame if we couldn't straighten things out for her."

"Where's the letter that started all this trouble?" Tink demanded.

"I don't know," Jing answered. "Nastee wouldn't tell me. I think he hid it somewhere after the damage was done."

Tink frowned. "That's bad. We need that letter. But we can't waste time looking for it. We've got to figure out some way to make *Private* James Donavon meet this girl that *Captain* James Donavon was in love with."

"What good will that do?" Jing asked.

"Can't tell," Tink shrugged. "Maybe none. But there's just a chance if we get them together something will happen to explain the whole thing. You see if this girl realized that it was another James Donavon's mail that she had read, it would automatically clear things up."

"It's a long chance, isn't it?" Jing said worriedly. "And how are you going to bring Private James Donavon and the girl together? No soldiers are allowed to leave camp you know."

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"I know," Tink said, "but I've got an idea. Come on, let's go over to the Captain's quarters."

CAPTAIN JAMES DONAVON was seated at his desk when Tink and Jing entered the tent. His orderly was standing beside him.

"Who shall I send to the village for your luggage, sir?" the orderly asked.

The Captain was staring moodily at the letters on his desk, his face set in gloomy lines.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Corporal Reynolds will do, if he isn't busy. I'll write out a pass for him."

He picked up a pen and pulled a scratch pad toward him. His pen scratched faintly as he scrawled out the pass and signed it hurriedly.

Tink nudged Jing excitedly.

"Maybe this is our break," he whispered.

"What do you mean?" asked Jing with a frown.

The Captain stood up and put his hat on.

"It's too early for him to leave now," he said, "but get him started after breakfast. I want to get this thing out of the way."

With a brief nod to the orderly he stamped out of the tent, hard-faced and grim.

The orderly looked after him and shook his head sadly.

"Too bad," he muttered, as he left the tent.

"Come on," Tink said to Jing.

He grabbed the telephone cord and clambered to the top of the desk. Jing followed him with a puzzled look on her face.

"What have you got in mind?" she asked, as she joined him.

Tink was hastily scanning the pass the Captain had written out and he didn't answer immediately.

"This might do it," he said at last.

He hopped across the desk to where the pen was lying. Exerting all his strength he was able to lift one end from the desk.

"You'll have to help me, Jing," he panted. "Take the other end."

"I still don't see what you're going to do," Jing protested.

"Wait and see," Tink said with a grin.

Between them they carried the heavy pen over to the pass the Captain had made out before leaving.

"This pass," explained Tink, "has Corporal Reynolds' name on it. All we have to do is scratch out his name and write in the name of Private James Donavon and presto! our problem of getting him and the Captain's girl together is solved."

Jing shook her head admiringly.

"My, but you're clever," she said.

Tink set the point of the pen on the paper and Jing lifted the other end in the air. Panting heavily Tink scratched out the name of Corporal Reynolds and wrote in the name of Private James Donavon. When he completed the job he was worn out, but he had the virtuous satisfaction of having completed the first step in his plan.

"Now what?" Jing asked, when they replaced the pen.

"Now we head for the village and the home of Mayor McCarthy and his daughter, Eileen. Private Donavon should arrive there in an hour or so to pick up the Captain's equipment. We want to be there then. . . ."

THE interior of the McCarthy home, a pleasant, well furnished cottage, was well lighted by the streaming morning sun, when Tink and Jing arrived and settled themselves on the mantel to await developments.

They did not have to wait long. In

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fifteen or twenty minutes the front door bell rang, and from the rear of the house a big, red-faced, white-haired man emerged to answer it.

"That's Mayor McCarthy," Jing informed Tink.

The Mayor jerked open the door and the scowl on his face deepened as he saw the uniformed figure standing there.

"Well?" he demanded truculently.

The soldier in the doorway removed his hat.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said, "but I've come for Captain Donavon's gear."

"That's Private Donavon," Tink whispered.

"You mean, you hope it is," Jing said.

The beet-red face of the Mayor looked ready to explode. The soldier in the doorway was shifting uneasily.

"So you've come for Captain Donavon's gear, have you?" he roared. "Well you can take it and good riddance. I don't want anything of that man's contaminating my house. And you can tell your Captain for me if I see him on my premises again I'll set the dogs on him."

The soldier in the doorway was a mouse-like little man with scraggly black hair and pale cheeks. He looked very frightened.

"Yes sir," he gulped, "I'll tell him."

"Dad!" a clear feminine voice called from the rear of the house. "Ask the soldier to come in. I'll give him C—Captain Donavon's things in just a minute."

Jing nudged Tink.

"That's Eileen," she whispered.

The soldier entered the front room of the cottage, twisting his cap in his hands, and the sputtering Mayor stamped wrathfully to the rear of the house.

Tink smiled contentedly. Things were working nicely.

In a minute a slim, beautiful, dark-haired Irish girl entered the room. Her face was pale and haunted with deep purple shadows under great, lovely eyes. She carried a belt, a military tunic and several sheafs of letters and reports in her arms.

"This is all I could find in the Captain's room," she said to the soldier, as she shifted the objects to his hands.

"Thank you, Miss. I'm sure everything's here."

The soldier shifted awkwardly from foot to foot and stared miserably at the pale, unhappy girl. He started for the door, then paused and turned.

"And," he blurted, "I'll tell him how nice you've been and everything."

THE girl smiled wanly.

"I wouldn't bother," she said. "I'm sure he wouldn't care one way or the other."

"That's where you're wrong, Miss," the soldier said earnestly. "I mean, he cares a lot about people and everybody. And he'd want to know if anybody put themselves out on his account. He's like that. That's why he's best C.O. in this man's army."

"Is he?" the girl said, a little breathlessly.

"Why sure," the soldier said enthusiastically. "Everybody likes the Captain." He paused and looked at the melting glint in the girl's eyes. "That is," he added cautiously, "almost everybody likes him."

Tink squeezed Jing's hand hopefully.

"Things are going fine," he whispered.

Jing didn't answer. Instead she pointed to the door which was open an inch or so. "We have company," she said.

Tink glanced at the door and his bright confidence faded.

Nastee stood in the crack of the door, a ghoulish smile on his puckered little

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features. He crossed the floor and swung himself up to the mantel with the aid of a dangling tassel that hung from the mantel drapery.

He sat down next to Jing. His sharp gleaming eyes were alight with sly speculation as he looked swiftly from Tink to Jing.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

"Nothing at all," Tink said hastily.

Nastee's sharp eyes swung to the Irish lass and the soldier standing in the center of the room. The soldier was extolling the merits of the Captain and the girl was listening, a rapt gleam in her eye.

"Oh, ho," Nastee said. "So that's your game. Soften the girl up by filling her full of stories about the Captain, eh?" He grinned nastily. "I can fix that, just you wait and see. I'll remind her of a story about the Captain that isn't so pleasant."

Before Tink could stop him he hopped down from the mantel and scurried across to a table that was set against the wall. He shinnied up the gnarled table leg and kicked back the knitted covering that protected the surface of the table. A letter was visible against the gleaming mohogany.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "This is the letter that caused all the trouble. Watch what happens when the girl is reminded of her dear Captain's wife and five, maybe six, brats."

Jing started to cry out, but Tink squeezed her arm.

"Give him enough rope," he whispered.

With another malicious giggle Nastee drew back his foot and kicked the letter into the air. It fluttered to the ground at the feet of the girl.

She picked it up and stared at it for a long moment, her face hardening and the light fading from her eyes.

"I almost forgot this," she said bitterly. "Your Captain may be all you say, but as far as I'm concerned he's the lowest type of creature on this earth."

Nastee was holding his sides in a paroxysm of glee.

"What did I tell you?" he chortled, between gasps.

But Tink was watching the soldier and he saw the man reach out with an incredulous look on his face and take the letter from the girl.

"Why, Miss," he said in a startled voice, "where did this come from?"

Without waiting for a reply he slipped the letter from the envelope and scanned it rapidly.

"It's from Maisie!" he cried delightedly.

The girl was looking at him as if he'd gone mad.

"What are you talking about?" she said. "That letter belongs to Captain Donavon. You've no right to be reading it."

"It's from my wife, Maisie," the soldier said rapturously. "It doesn't belong to the Captain. He hasn't got a wife."

THE girl's eyes opened wide and her cheeks flushed red.

"You're talking nonsense," she said weakly. "You must be."

The soldier was grinning widely.

"No I'm not, Miss. This letter must've come in with the last shipment of mail." A dazed look spread over his face. "Lord! that was two months ago. Maybe I've got six kids now."

The girl shook her head bewilderedly.

"You c—can't be telling the truth. What was the letter doing in the Captain's room? And why was it addressed to him? Oh, you're lying to me!"

"No, Miss, I'm not," the soldier insisted. "The Captain had the letter for

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the very good reason that it's his job to censor all mail, coming and going. And about it being addressed to him, why look again!"

The girl took the letter eagerly, but her shoulders slumped despairingly when she studied it.

"Right there in black and white," she said accusingly. "It's addressed to 'James Donavon'."

"Naturally," the soldier said. "I'm James Donavon. Same name as the Captain. This ain't the first time our mails got mixed up."

Jing hugged Tink happily.

"You did it!" she cried. "Everything all right now. Oh, Tink, you're marvelous."

The girl was looking at the letter, a dazed happy look in her eyes.

"Then this is *your* letter," she exclaimed.

The soldier nodded, grinning.

"That's what I been trying to tell you, Miss."

"Then the Captain isn't married to Maisie?"

"He'd better not be," the soldier said.

"And he doesn't have five children?"

The soldier grinned happily.

"He doesn't have *six* children!"

The Irish girl crushed the letter to her as if it were the most precious thing in the world.

"Oh!" she cried, "I've never been happier in my life."

She leaned forward and kissed the amazed soldier on the cheek.

"Take that to your Captain," she laughed.

The soldier rubbed his cheek in embarrassment.

"I couldn't hardly do that," he said, "but I'll explain things so's he'll get the general idea."

He left then and the girl danced back through the room to the rear of the house, singing happily.

Tink and Jing sat on the mantel, swinging their legs over the edge. Tink had his arm around Jing's waist and they laughed until the tears came to their eyes.

Nastee was standing on the mahogany table, his features twisted in a scowl of bitter disappointment. He stared at them balefully, hands set belligerently on his hips.

"Well, what's so funny!" he snapped.

"You," Jing giggled.

Nastee scowled unpleasantly at them and then he slid down the table leg and made for the door, both hands pressed to his temples.

"I think he's got a hangover," Tink observed with considerable satisfaction.

THAT night peace was restored to the pleasant village of Ballycree. Soldiers from the American Camp strolled the streets of the little town and smiled in genuine friendliness at the villagers, who patted them on the back and invited them into their homes to sample their beer and meet their daughters.

A pale, mellow moon cast a lambent glow over the village and countryside and by its friendly light couples could be seen strolling arm in arm through dells and glens in which the tiny town nestled.

One of these couples stopped to rest by an old-fashioned stone well.

Captain James Donavon looked down at the beautiful, dark-haired girl at his side and he sighed in sheer happiness.

"You'll always love me, won't you?" he said softly.

"Forever and ever," the girl answered, smiling.

Tink and Jing were seated on the

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edge of the well, listening interestedly. Nastee was bathing his fevered brow in the bucket that swung gently over the deep dark well.

Jing sighed and looked at the moon. "Aren't they a wonderful couple?" she said dreamily.

Tink nodded happily. "It would have been a shame if anything happened to their romance."

Nastee looked up from the rim of the bucket.

"Remind me never to drink beer again," he said mournfully. "And," he added spitefully, "don't be too surprised if something *does* happen to the Captain's beautiful romance." He grinned wickedly. "I just have a hunch that someone is in for a very unpleasant surprise."

At that moment the Captain leaned back and his elbow jarred against the well crank. With a rusty creak the ratchet slipped and the swinging bucket plummeted downward into the black depths of the well.

The Captain looked around, slightly surprised.

"Well," he said, grinning, "no harm done."

He took the dark-haired girl by the arm and they sauntered slowly away.

Tink and Jing peered over the well's rim. Faintly they heard Nastee's outraged, spluttering shrieks from the depths of the deserted well. They looked at each other and smiled. Then they climbed down to the ground and sauntered away, arm-in-arm.

THE END

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

(Continued from page 8)

a great number of people seem to think, because of certain religious laws, but for laws of sanitation and hygiene.

Living in a country where every water supply is alive with disease-producing bacteria, the Chinese find that the heated tea destroys the most malignant germs.

NEXT time you hear somebody tell you they saw something white, don't you believe them. By scientific standards, there is no true color "white." What you think is a "true white" is actually grayer and darker than the perfect white. Very pure chalk and an extremely heavy layer of new-fallen snow are the closest colors to the perfect white.

GEORGIA has an army of 300,000,000. And each one of them is on the battle front today. You see, this army is composed of little fellows named *trichogramma minutum*. They are a gnat-sized wasplet which during the past ten years have proved themselves invaluable in abating the ravages of codling moth and fruit moth in Georgia's famous apple and peach orchards.

These "soldiers" have been bred and turned loose in the orchards. They lay their microscopic eggs within the moth's eggs and the tiny, but hungry larvae destroy the foe by literally boring from within. Upon examination of thousands of moth eggs, it was found that more than half the codling moth eggs and over one-third of the fruit moth's eggs had been "bombed" by the tiny hero wasps.

DON WILCOX has moved himself and his family out to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, as a permanent home. His stories will be written amid the sylvan beauty—whoops, there we go, getting jealous. His stories will be written on a typewriter as they always have been. And in a room in a house, just the same as we live in. And the air is probably no cleaner than in Chicago, if as clean. And besides, it will cost him more postage. But we feel that the stories will remain as his consistent excellent quality. However, we hope the lake breezes don't tempt him away from his work too often. Best of everything, Don, in your new home. And Mrs. Don, and little Miss Don too!

MALARIA is a problem in today's jungle fighting, so it's good news that quinine has a new assistant in fighting the fever. Adrenalin is injected daily into the veins of patients stricken with malaria. This treatment is beneficial because it reduces the amount of blood in the spleen, making conditions unsuitable for malaria germs to exist. Adrenalin has been found to be as useful in chronic cases of malaria as it is in newly acquired cases.

AFRAID of a tiger, or a lion? Shucks, they aren't so hot as killers. For his size, the most ferocious and murderous animal known to man is the least weasel. He closely resembles a reptile

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in appearance by possessing a long, flat head and wide jaws. He also emulates the reptile by hunting in a sneaky, slinking manner.

In addition to the least weasel's natural ferocity, he has been endowed with the ability to change his color from reddish-brown in summer to white in winter, making him the most feared enemy of the birds and mice upon which he lives.

The least weasel is truly a killer for he will often kill his victims just for the sheer pleasure of the kill. The only benefit the least weasel is to man is that among his victims the favorites are rats and a number of insects that destroy crops.

OPEN letter to David V. Reed. "Dear Mr. Reed: Where in aitch are those stories you promised to write? Our readers are asking for a few yarns from your typewriter, and believe you us, so are we! When do we get 'em?"

WATCH your lip there, girls! No back talk! It seems that the perfumes in certain lipsticks are sometimes harmful to the skin. Dermatologists have traced skin disorders to perfumes used in lip rouge containing methyl heptine carbonate. The oil and dyes in lipstick very seldom cause trouble.

If the shade of your present tube of lipstick is satisfactory, girls, don't change scents—if you do, make certain that the offender, methyl heptine carbonate is not present.

MOST of the horror stories we've read tell gruesomely of the corpse in the formaldehyde tank in the medical school laboratory. But from now on, we like formaldehyde. Reason?

Well, a few years ago, an eminent scientist, Eugene Albert Prudhomme, of Kremlin-Bicetre, France, took out a patent to synthesize sugar from formaldehyde. Light, filtered through a reddish-orange colored filter, is used instead of sunlight. (As in the case of nature when she manufactures sugar from the atmospheric gases.)

The formaldehyde gas is passed through a tank filled with lime-treated water. The red-orange light passes through the glass walls of the tank, causing the formaldehyde to become polymerized. The light causes the molecules of formaldehyde to join together to form saccharose, or sugar molecules.

The lime sets the sugar as it forms. This substance is then treated with carbon-dioxide gas to separate the lime from the sugar. A syrup remains after this process which can be treated to produce granulated sugar.

MANY long years ago, the inhabitants of the South Sea Isles used to avoid America, because they were afraid the cannibals would get 'em! Well, maybe not literally, but that *could* have been their reason for ignoring the travel bureau's illustrated folders; because according to the report of some archaeologists who were excavating near Glendive, Montana, some of the earliest inhabitants of America were cannibals. They uncovered a great quantity of human bones and many of them showed signs of having been roasted.

In one group of bones, the men found five human skulls, three of which showed signs of having been burned. Of course, these discoveries do not prove conclusively that these people were cannibals, for the remains might have resulted from burial rites which ended in cremation. The only premise upon which cannibalism can be based is the fact that only some of the remains excavated showed signs of burning, while the others were completely free from any such indications.

It is also interesting to note that all of the teeth found were in perfect condition and one skull still had twenty-five perfect teeth in place.

THIS war would be a blessing to the insects we usually "flit" in our homes, if it weren't for the fact that we can now "grow" our own poison used in insecticide. A recent addition to our home-grown products is a plant named pyrethrum. This plant contains pyrethrin, which is the "killing" agent found in the many household insecticides.

A member of the "mum" family, pyrethrum is often mistaken for our own innocent daisy. All parts of this country can be used to produce the plant and the domestic crop yields as much pyrethrin as the imported product.

So you flies, beware. You can't pester us unafraid of retribution.

And that ends our notebook for this month. We're running out of notes! *Rap.*

"Professor, puh-lease! This is no place to get absent-minded!"

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The gun flamed a great gust of red

Murder took place on this ship in space over a treasure—a perfect crime. But then the dead man came to life to confront his killer!

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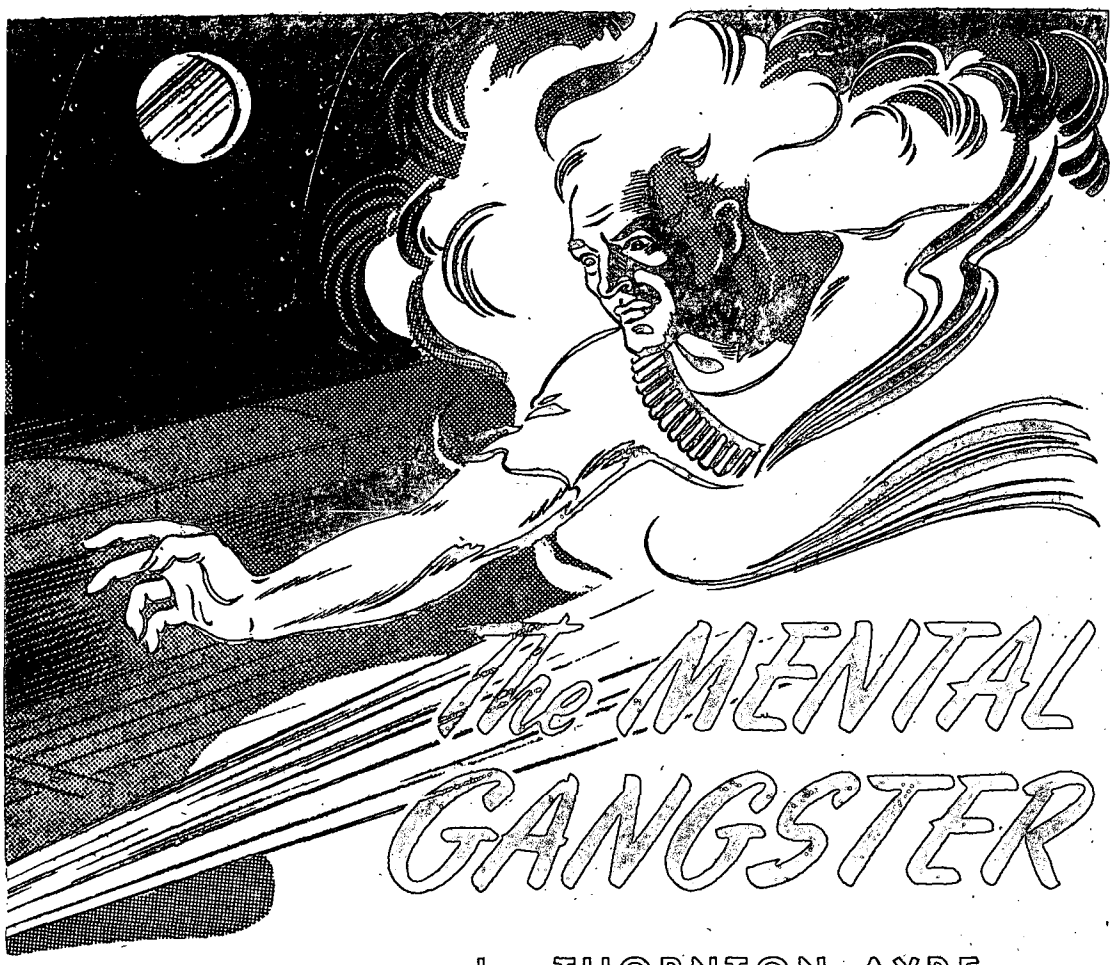

The MENTAL GANGSTER

by THORNTON AYRE

THIS was zero hour. Blackie Melrose had been banking on it for three months, either plotting in his cell, else giving signals to his fellow convicts in the mineral sorting room. Four of them were ready to make the break any minute now. . . .

Blackie's cold gray eyes scowled at the electric clock on the metal wall as the second hand crept round. His fingers played with the minerals on the conveyor belt. His gaze shifted to his fellow conspirators and from their appointed positions they responded with tight little nods. . . . All four of them the toughest bunch that had ever decided to try and escape the prison walls of this asteroid penitentiary way out beyond Pluto—lonely, damned. . . .

Sixtieth second exactly!

"Right!" Blackie snapped; then a whirlwind of action exploded into the fear-quiet silence.

The guards up on their balcony were taken by surprise: that was the crux of the thing. Doors opened for conveyor trucks remained open, mysteriously—jammed. Four men slammed and hammered their way to them. Knives glittered, ray guns exploded, tables and small machines overturned.

Blackie, six feet of iron hard muscle, used only his fists—but with terrific effect. The two guards who jumped

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to seize him fell away, one slugged on top of the head and the other with a mashed jaw.

Sirens started to scream as the four pelted down the corridor outside. "Knife" Halligan whipped out his trusty blade, drove it mercilessly to the heart of the solitary sentry at the external valve. He dropped.

"Here!" Knife panted, whisking suits from a concealed plate of metal in the wall. "Spacesuits. We'll make it. Those guards are all messed up in the machine room— You locked the doors on them, Pen?"

Pen Anderson nodded.

The scrambled and struggled into their suits, slammed the visor-helmets in place. Then, Blackie leading, they opened the valve and emerged onto the starlit plain outside. There, as arranged, was the spaceship awaiting them.

At top speed they raced to it, blundered through the airlock even as the hail of raygun charges seared after them, to flash back harmlessly on the slammed barrier. The ship took off immediately, left the barren little asteroid far below—climbed slowly and inexorably to the stars.

Blackie took off his spacesuit slowly, then slid big hands comfortably down his overalled thighs.

"Well, boys, we made it!" His voice was hoarse with satisfaction. "All the sweat an' planning wasn't for nothing, see. Y'can trust Blackie—always gets you in the clear. Yes, sir!" He rubbed his close-cropped dark head complacently, then lighted a half cigarette and relaxed gratefully in a wall chair.

"And them screws can never get us now," he finished. "It's space—and freedom!"

Knife Halligan gave a slow nod, switched his ratty eyes to the man at the control board.

"You did a nice job, Conroy," he said slowly.

"So I thought."

CONROY slipped the automatic pilot in position and turned to face the quartet. All the men caught up a little sharp and looked at each other. Conroy was a go-between—not the first time he had assisted in a getaway with a pirated ship . . . but it was the first time he had looked so white around the gills about it. He had a dead, codfish-gray face, and his eyes stared with the murky brazenness of smeared glass.

"What's gotten into you, Conroy?" Rays Walford asked quickly. "Been taking a shot of dope, or something? You look slewed."

"Do I?" Conroy seemed surprised. "Perhaps it's space strain. I'll fix up something for you to eat. . . ."

He went out to the provision department and the four men looked at each other again. Rays Walford, best mineral-frisker this side of Pluto, rubbed his pointed jaw thoughtfully.

"Say, Blackie, he's acting kind of queer, isn't he? Notice his way of talking, too? Like he's upped a bit on his eddication since we saw him last."

"Why the heck not?" Blackie demanded. "We've been in the pen five years, don't forget. A guy can polish his A.B.C. a lot in that time. Always was screwy about books was Conroy. . . ."

"Yeah, I suppose so—but it's still kind of queer. He talks nearly as high hat as Pen here."

Pen Anderson, round, greasy, slimy as the blackmailing racket by which he had lived before the law had caught up on him, gave a shrug.

"Some acquire it; others have it naturally. I'm the latter, of course. Pity of it is I have to associate with you lice.

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. . ." He regarded his fingernails thoughtfully.

Nobody said anything: they were accustomed to Pen's highbrow methods. Then after a while Conroy came back with the same dead look on his face. He put out the meal, seemed oblivious to the eyes fixed steadily on him as the four wired in hungrily.

"All set for the Earth trip?" Blackie asked presently.

"Certainly. That's what you paid for, wasn't it?"

"I'm just asking you: I want to get the thing straight. How soon do you figure you can get us there?"

"Oh, about three weeks. Barring accidents."

"Accidents!" Knife Halligan looked up with tight jaws. "*What* accidents?"

"Space," Conroy shrugged, "is full of potential accidents."

"Yeah? . . ." Then, Knife's truculence subsided at a scowl from Blackie. He satisfied himself with a muttered warning. "Be too bad for you, Conroy, if you queer the set-up, that's all."

"I agree," murmured Pen, dabbing his greasy jowls. "It is essential I reach Earth as soon as possible. I have a certain—hum—matter to attend to. Valuable matter! Most important."

"More graft and corruption, eh?" Blackie grinned. "I'll hand it to you, Pen, you sure make good use of that phony polish and handwriting of yours."

"And I," said Rays Walford, "have certain rocks to get dumped." He patted his belt significantly. "I packed enough away to put me on velvet for the rest of my life once we touch Earth —"

He broke off suddenly and looked up as, surprisingly enough, the ship's distress signal suddenly flashed. It was actuated by something cutting across the photoelectric beam from the prow, thereby giving instant warning of anything ahead.

Immediately Conroy moved to the observation port.

"A space ship! A small one!" he ejaculated. Then he gave a frown. "That's odd—way off the usual lanes, too."

"Dodge it!" Blackie snapped, coming up. "Dodge it, I tell you! We're answering no distress calls this trip. Understand?"

"Frankly," Conroy said, looking round with that stare that went through things, "I *don't* understand. The code of space has to be obeyed. You are safe—all of you. You're not in convicts' clothes, only overalls. And this isn't a law ship . . . I've got to stop!"

"You do," Knife Halligan whispered, blade glittering in his clenched fist, "and I'll pin you to the damned switchboard—"

"Shut up!" Blackie snapped, wheeling on him. "Come to think of it, Conroy's right at that. Going past would create suspicion. Stop, and we'll be in the clear. We're armed. Okay—pull up."

THEY all waited tensely, faces sweating a little as Conroy slowed the machine down with a burst of the forward jets. Airlock interchange began. At last the control room door opened and a figure with helmet tossed back on steel plated shoulders entered. It was a girl, much peroxided about the hair, much painted, faintly sardonic in expression.

"A dame!" Rays Walford ejaculated. "Well, is that something! Ain't seen one in—"

He was going to say "five years" but the warning glance of Knife Halligan stopped him. For her part the girl slammed the door and gazed on the assembly coolly.

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"What is this, a convention?" she inquired dryly. "Any of you mugs got tongues? My ship's out of fuel: how about some?"

"Your *own* ship?" Conroy questioned, and her frizzy head nodded.

"Yeah. I was headed back for Earth as a matter of fact. I'm a solo dancer—or was—at Draconi's Cabaret, cheap sort of dive located at Easter City, Neptune. They sort of didn't like my style, and so . . ." The girl shrugged. "I decided a girl can do better on her native planet where she has friends. But I started off without enough juice. Give me a little, and I'll trouble you no more."

"There's none to spare," Blackie answered roughly. "But we're heading for Earth, so you can have a free ride."

"But— What about my ship?"

"Forget it! It looks like an old model, anyway."

"Look here, smart guy, that bus cost me plenty of—"

"I said forget it, see!" Blackie's lips were tight.

The girl relaxed slowly, her gray eyes fixed on Blackie's uncompromising visage; then with a shrug she pulled off the rest of her space suit and stood revealed in a form fitting dress that made Rays Walford's eyes open a shade wider.

"All right, Gorilla, so be it," she shrugged. "I slept in a sewer once, so I guess I can take this. . . . If you want to speak to me the name's Dorothy Wilson—*Miss* Wilson, to you."

"That's plain Dot to me," Blackie grunted. "Get moving again, Conroy; no time to waste."

The ship began moving forward again. The girl, her cynical eyes watching everything intently, perched herself near the table and daintily fingered what was left of a bowl of concentrates. Rays Walford took his eyes off her slender legs finally and rubbed his jaw speculatively.

"Get this!" Blackie snapped suddenly, swinging round. "This dame means nothing to us, see? Nothing! Just a free passenger. Because she's a woman doesn't mean any of you mugs can get funny ideas. One pass at her and I'll plaster you all over the wall. Okay?"

"Okay, Blackie," Pen Anderson soothed. "Okay. You know us."

"And how!" Blackie looked at the girl. "I'm Blackie Melrose: you can rely on me."

She raised an eyebrow. "Looking at you I was thinking there might be something to the recessive unit theory, after all. However, I'm not scared of any of you—least of all Dead Pan over at the controls there. I'm a girl who's been around, see. . . . And now, if you gallants have no objection, I'll find me a bunk."

She departed towards the sleeping quarters of the roomy vessel. The four men looked at each other, Conroy apparently not interested in the proceedings anyway.

"This," Pen mused, "means that one of us is going to be minus a bunk. And I shall certainly not sleep with any of you lice."

"You'll bunk with Knife, and like it!" Blackie told him curtly.

"Okay with me," Knife growled; "but I tell you straight, Blackie, I don't like this dame turning up. She may be a jinx. She looks like a leg-swinger all right, but suppose she's a special agent put on our trail by prison radio? That's possible."

"Anything," Conroy said, from the switchboard, "is possible. But I think the girl is genuine enough. I've seen her in cabarets before today—" He broke off, pulling quickly at the various switches. His sudden strained anxiety

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was immediately obvious.

"That's odd!" he ejaculated. "Very odd!"

"What is?" Blackie asked sharply; and the others crowded hastily round the controls.

CONROY fingered the switches agitatedly for a space, then he looked up dazedly.

"We're—in a sink hole!" he gasped. "A four-point sink hole!"

There was silence for a moment—grim silence. Each man knew what that meant. A four-point sink hole was the terror of space—a literally becalmed spot where no movement is possible . . . . created by the converging of four different gravity fields, the exact central point holding a ship with equal power on every side so nothing of its own devising could move it in any direction.

"Yes," Conroy went on, figuring quickly, "we're in the foci of Neptune, Pluto, and Asteroids 67/B and 32/J. That means—"

"It means, you two timing rat, that you've done it deliberately!" Knife Halligan shouted, whirling him to his feet. "Stalled us so a police ship can finally catch up—"

Blackie whirled them apart, sent Knife spinning to the wall with a thrust of his powerful arm. Then he eyed Conroy grimly. Conroy backed to his controls, his dead-looking eyes staring.

"It wasn't deliberate, Blackie!" he insisted. "We were on the course until we stopped to pick up that girl. I forgot to alter our path and now we—"

"How," Blackie asked deliberately, "do we get free? Better think quick, feller."

"I may be able to think of something. I can calculate—"

"I should!" Blackie's voice was ominous. "We'll grab some rest while you do it. We didn't get money drafted to your account for you to stall us here. . . . Come on, you mugs—to the sleeping quarters. And what I said about the dame still goes!"

BLACKIE reckoned he had been asleep in his bunk for perhaps an hour or so when he was suddenly awakened by a piercing scream. Immediately he whirled to the floor, hurried down the narrow passage whither the scream had come. It took him into the big provision chamber. At the sight before him he drew up short.

The light was fully on, dim though it was, and Rays Walford lay on the floor, clutching his chest. There was a red stain on his shirt; it brimmed through onto his fingers— But that wasn't all. Dorothy Wilson was there too, staring down at him in horror.

Blackie glanced at her, then dropped at Walford's side, raised his head and shoulders.

"I—I guess I shan't make the journey, Blackie. . . . My — my rocks! They're — they're gone — Somebody . . ."

Blackie felt along the belt. The pouches on it were empty.

"It—it—" Walford's voice failed him. He became suddenly inert and his breathing stopped. Blackie lowered him slowly to the floor and his smoldering eyes sought the girl in the dim light. She was still by the wall.

"What happened?" he snapped.

"I heard him scream, so I came in—"

"Don't hand me that! More likely Rays made a pass at you, you struggled, found the pouches on his belt while you struggled— Then you finished him off with something. Scissors mebbe. You probably carry 'em. . . . Hand over those rocks, sister!"

"What rocks? What are you talk-

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ing about?"

"Minerals, then, if you want to be particular. They're worth a fortune; good meat for a gold digger like you—Come on, give!"

Blackie strode towards her, then stopped as a small pearl-handled ray pistol flashed into her hand.

"Put your brakes on, Gorilla. Nobody mauls me without getting his fingers burned. . . . I've told you the truth," the girl added curtly. "I heard this guy scream, and when I came in the light was on dimly—as it is now—and he was lying there. That's all I know."

"Those other mugs wouldn't steal from a fellow con."

"So that's what you are—convicts! Thought I knew the haircut— Well, question the others! I'm not so sure of their honor as you seem to be!"

Blackie hesitated, brows down. He was powerful enough, agile enough, to snatch the gun and fling the girl across the compartment. But he didn't. Wheeling, he strode out with a taut face through the sleeping quarters. His bellow aroused the others. In the control room he faced them, shot the facts.

"One of you guys—and that goes for you too, Conroy—killed Rays!"

"Not us," said Knife Halligan seriously. "We got honor, ain't we?"

"Whichever one of you has got those rocks had better hand 'em over," Blackie breathed. "Either that, or I beat it out of you! Rays Walford has a family to support: those rocks go to them. Come on! Hand over!"

Faces became set and there was no movement. Blackie relaxed, puzzling.

"You heard nothing?"

Every head save the girl's shook. Blackie swung round on Conroy.

"You haven't been asleep, Conroy; you've been working on this navigation problem. You heard *something?*"

"Nothing, I assure you." Conroy's face was expressionless.

"Perhaps," the girl said languidly, "there's a jinx on the ship?"

"Yeah—*you!*" Knife Halligan spat. "First we lose our course; then we get in a sink hole; then Rays gets bumped off—"

"Shut up!" Blackie snapped. He jerked his thumb toward the storage compartment. "Come and help me look around. Those rocks must be somewhere. Maybe they were dropped or something. Once they're found we'll figure out between us what comes next. . . ."

THEY all turned and started an examination. They were busy on the job in the dim light, poking into the various corners when Blackie whirled suddenly and pinned Knife Halligan to the wall with a mighty forearm across his throat. With his free hand he whipped Halligan's deadly weapon from his belt and studied it keenly . . . Then he dropped his hold and handed the knife back quietly.

"Okay, it's clean," he said briefly. "This blade of yours is old-type steel; bound to be some signs if you'd stabbed with it."

"Big of you!" Knife snarled, shaking himself. "I didn't take those rocks, though I wouldn't have minded. There's such a thing as honor—"

"One of us killed him," Blackie stated. "And before we are through, unless we get out of this sink hole—and even if we do—one of us is going to confess to it. Space can crack a guy wide open in time . . . and a woman too," he finished significantly, seeing the girl searching assiduously.

There was silence for a moment, then Blackie shrugged.

"Give me a hand to put him in cold storage. If we fire him outside he'll

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just lie out there and give us the jitters."

He and Knife carried the corpse to the refrigerator and dumped it inside, slammed the door. Then with a grim face Blackie led the way back into the control room.

"When do we start to get out of this sink hole?" he demanded of Conroy.

"It begins to look," Conroy answered slowly, "as though we don't! I've figured it every way I can—but I can't see how we can move. I've tried rocket blasts on every side, but the gravity field is equal in all directions."

"Give it all you've got," Blackie snapped. "The blast may free us—"

"And if we use up all that fuel, what happens then?" Conroy demanded. "We shan't have enough to make the Earth."

"Blast us out the other way," Knife suggested. "We might get to the girl's ship—"

"No use; I'm out of fuel," she put in.

"This is what comes of having a dame on the ship!" Knife blazed, his voice a screech. "We were all right until you made us divert our path! Do you realize what'll happen to us?" he went on desperately. "Death! Stuck here in the void! *Death!*"

"Oh, shut up!" Blackie growled. "Conroy was no more to blame than any of us. Might happen to any navigator. . . . But we've *got* to get free," he finished anxiously. "We can't stop here—becalmed. Our provisions won't last out."

"We might signal a ship," Conroy speculated. "If we could get aboard and hold up the crew . . ."

"Might work as a last resort," Blackie mused. "Damned dangerous, though. Better try figuring again, Conroy. I'm going to have another look around the provision room."

"What for?" asked Knife malevolently, his eyes smoldering. "I suppose you're looking for them rocks? Let your hair down, Blackie: you're as keen on finding those rocks as any of us. For that matter, how do we know you didn't kill Rays, anyway?"

Blackie leaned over, whirled Knife out of the wall chair, held him steadily.

"Listen, Knife!" His voice was low, deadly. "Any more cracks like that and I'll be liable to forget you're my pal. I'll remember instead that you're a cheap crook; a back-stabber. . . . I'm going to take a proper look for those rocks, sure; but I've already told you why. Sit down!" He flung Knife back helplessly into his chair then strode out. . . .

AS BEFORE, he found nothing of particular interest. Slowly he wandered round, flashing a torch this time; then just as he was about to give up the beam caught suddenly on a strip of paper wedged in a crack between two of the welded plates. Curious, he jerked it out. It was a thrice folded note, finishing with a hasty slash of the pencil.

"Blackie—this is to warn you I expect death any minute.

There's a jinx aboard this ship. You must—"

It stopped there. No signature, no hint of who had written it. It was not Rays Walford's scrawl; that Blackie well know. He frowned over it, biting his lip. Conroy? Impossible. Conroy was still alive. Then who the—

Pen Anderson came in silently, that smile of perpetual innocence on his greasy, round face.

"Anything of interest yet, Blackie?"

"Nope." Blackie balled the note in his palm then thrust it in his pocket. "But because I haven't found anything doesn't say I won't figure out who killed Rays. And I'll find where those rocks

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went too—"

"I know where they are." Pen smiled blandly. "I'll even tell you—for a consideration."

"Yeah? Why so generous? If you know where they are why talk about splitting them. Why tell me anything, in fact?"

Pen regarded his nails. "You misunderstand me, Blackie. I don't want the rocks: I have no agents who can sell them for me on Earth like you have. All I want is a price for telling you where they are. If you give your word, I know you'll pay up when you get the money. You're a square shooter—"

"Listen, you greasy, pot-bellied rat, you don't trust me any more than I trust you."

"But I do," Pen murmured. "You see, unless you pay up I shall be compelled to inform the Earth authorities of certain — er — activities. I'd tell them all about you. That is my profession."

"What makes you think we'll ever reach Earth, anyway? You'll get nothing—unless it's my fist in your face—"

Blackie stopped dead at a sudden scream from the control room and the voice of Dorothy Wilson raised high in frightened anger.

"Get away from me, you killer! Get away before I—"

Blackie jumped. In a bull rush he hurtled into the control room and was just in time to see the hapless girl pinned against the wall by Knife Halligan. The wicked blade of his weapon was pointed directly at the girl's soft throat. Her terrified eyes stared back into his.

"A jinx," he whispered. "More than a jinx—a dame who knows too much! You can make it easy for yourself in only one way, sister: give me a little cooperation, and—"

"And what?" Blackie roared; then without waiting for an answer he dived.

The knife whipped round, shot towards him unerringly. He jerked his head aside and the knife landed quivering in the back of the wooden chair by the table. That settled it for Blackie. He finished his plunge, gripped Knife by the throat and slammed him round. A terrific uppercut lifted him off his feet, sent him toppling over the table to land against the wall. He stirred weakly, blood trickling from his gashed mouth.

"What happened, kid?" Blackie caught the girl's round arm.

"He—he went for me," she panted, her eyes flashing. "I was sitting quiet as you please, but he kept watching me through slits of eyes. Then suddenly he went berserk: I hadn't a chance to defend myself—"

"Why didn't you stop him, Conroy?" Blackie demanded.

"Me? I'm not strong enough . . . Besides, I have this problem to work out."

"It seems," Blackie said bitterly, gazing at Knife, then at Pen and Conroy, "that I'm the only guardian of this dame. Okay. Any more attacks like this upon her and I'll put the one who does it permanently out of commission. That clear enough?"

"Aw, go jump through the airlock," Knife snarled. "One would think you'd fallen for the dame. She's a jinx, I tell you, and the sooner she's out cold the better for all of us—"

"To hell with your superstition," Blackie retorted. "And watch yourself in future. In fact I'll take your knife to be sure that you do . . ."

HE WHIPPED it out of the chair back, slipped it in his belt. Then he jerked a thumb to the girl.

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"Better go and grab that sleep of yours. You're safe enough."

She nodded a grateful thanks and stole out. Blackie kicked the chair in position and for a long time sat watching the scowling Knife through his eyelashes. Pen Anderson sat down too, dividing his attention between them; then finally he relaxed and polished his nails gently on his tunic sleeve.

"I'm still open to discussion, Blackie," he murmured.

"About those rocks? I'm making no terms, Pen. I'll find them in my own time—"

"So," Knife whispered, rising up slowly from where he had fallen, "*you* know where they went, you dirty sneak-thief! You!"

"Sure, and I am prepared to—"

Blackie whipped Halligan's knife from his belt and aimed the sharp point at Pen's big stomach.

"Where are they?" he asked ominously.

"Now wait a minute, Blackie. You ought to—"

"I said where are they? Open up, before I make you!"

Pen's beaming expression changed to sourness. "The girl's got them," he growled.

Blackie's face went livid. "You rotten liar! She wouldn't do that, and you know it!"

"Wouldn't she?" Knife breathed, leaning over the table. "I tell you she did, just as I—" He stopped, biting his lip.

There followed an icy silence. Blackie's cold eyes moved slowly to the knife he was holding. He whipped it suddenly from Pen's middle and stared at the blade. There were new, faintly brownish marks smearing it.

"So it *was* you who killed Rays Walford!" he flamed. "You, Knife! I get it now. I didn't see these marks before because of the dim light in the storage room. Yeah, you killed him, but the girl knew it. That's why you wanted to kill her, not because she is a jinx. You wanted to stop her before she started to—"

Blackie's voice trailed off. He stiffened: Knife and Pen became alert too. Conroy seemed to have fallen asleep over his task at the control board. . . .

There was a queer sound abroad, the sound of footfalls coming from the sleeping quarters of the vessel. The sounds were interrupted suddenly by the precipitate arrival of the girl. For the first time she looked really scared and wild-eyed.

"I think it's—it's Rays Walford!" she gulped, and for a moment looked as though she were going to faint.

Blackie got up, caught her arm and steadied her; then he began to back from the table, facing the door leading to the sleeping quarters. Pen did likewise. Knife remained where he was, his paralyzed gaze fixed on the opening.

Thud—Pause. Thud—Pause. Like feet lifted by strings and dropped again. Like the footfalls of a mannikin—deliberate, implacable. Icy tension settled on the control chamber—then from the shadows of the interdoorway Rays Walford appeared! He remained motionless for a moment or two, arms hanging slackly at his sides. That red stain was still upon his heart; his eyes stared with glassy hate. Suddenly his blue lips began to move.

"Knife Halligan, you killed me! *You killed me!*"

Knife just stared, hands gripping the table edges, sweat running down his face.

"My God!" Blackie whispered, still clutching the girl. "It *is* Walford! But how in hell's name did he—?"

The girl had nothing to say; she was shuddering with fear. As for Pen

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Anderson, his eyes were nearly popping out of his skull.

"You're a ghost—a phantom!" Knife chattered, stumbling over his words. "You've come back—but you can't do nothing, see? The dead can't hurt the living! There's a gap—a big gap—between life and death! You can't touch me—"

Just the same he got up and in a blind rush snatched down the heavy rapid fire ray gun from the wall. He pressed the button and directed a withering sheet of fire at Walford.

THE effect was terrible. Clothing and flesh scorched and blackened, but Walford did not flinch. Instead he came forward, without a vestige of expression on his face. Stunned, Knife dropped the gun, backed into the corner, came up sharp with his back to the wall.

"You can't do nothing!" he panted. "Y'can't, I tell you—!"

The answer was immediate. Walford's hand flashed up, closed round Knife's throat in a steel grip that all his struggles could not dislodge. Gurgling, choking, grunting, he slid to the floor.

Blackie's jaws quivered: the girl hid her face on his shoulder. At last there was a dull thud and Walford dropped his length to the floor, motionless—But in the corner beside him lay Knife with protruding tongue and startling eyes . . . strangled.

Blackie dumped the girl in a chair then went over to the two bodies. Utter perplexity settled upon him. Knife was dead all right—but so was Rays Walford, as dead as he had been when stabbed!

"I don't get it!" Blackie's voice was bemused as he stared into Pen Anderson's dazed eyes. "I don't get it . . . Space can't revive a guy from death—unless we've never encountered it before. But anyway, he was locked in the refrigerator. Somebody must have opened it. The locks are on this side."

"But nobody went that way—!" Pen stopped, added softly, "That is, nobody except the girl!"

"Do you think I had anything to do with this?" she nearly shrieked, looking up. "Do you think I was putting on an act, trying to play scared? Not me! I heard him coming and ran for it— Oh, my God, I've got to get off this ship! Anything! I'd sooner chuck myself headfirst into space than endure—"

"Easy!" Blackie snapped, going over and shaking her. "Get yourself in hand! You can't get off this ship any more than any of us can— There's an explanation for this. There *has* to be! Dead men don't start walking without a reason." He stopped and thought; then he asked, "Just what happened when you went to rest again?"

"Why, I—I went to sleep."

"So soon?"

"I guess so. Then Rays' footfalls awakened me. I caught a glimpse of him coming and made a dash for it . . ."

"She's lying, man!" Pen growled. "She's been back of everything that's gone wrong so far, so why not this? We got trapped here: she was mixed up in Rays' murder: now she's mixed up in him coming back."

"I'm not!" she shouted desperately. "I swear I'm not!"

"Did you, or did you not, take those mineral rocks from Walford?" Blackie asked deliberately.

She hesitated, gaze averted; then she slowly nodded.

"Yes, I did. I heard him scream. I rushed in and saw Knife just about

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to rob his belt. He dashed out, thinking I hadn't recognized him in the dim light, I imagine. I examined Walford's belt to see what Knife had been looking for, found the minerals and realized their value. I took them, hid them in my bunk after you'd finished questioning me, Blackie. Right then I was determined the rocks should be handed in to the Earth-authorities and not left to the mercies of no-account crooks. That was why Knife tried to kill me, in *case* I knew he had committed the murder . . . But *this!* I know nothing about it."

Blackie slowly nodded.

"I believe you, sister," he said briefly. "God knows why, but I do. Maybe because I think you're not so tough as you make out . . ."

He turned as Conroy aroused himself, yawned, and went on with his work.

"Hey, Conroy, what do you know about this?"

But Conroy, turning in surprise, had to have all the details having slept through the astounding episode. At the finish he gave a shrug.

"So that's what happened! I've heard of such things before, Blackie, out in space. Of men coming back to life. The radiations out of space do it for a brief time, particularly if the body is well preserved—as it was in the refrigerator."

"Yeah? How come the bolts got opened on *this* side?"

"I don't know. But a man from the dead can have powers that we haven't got. Will power maybe—"

"Bunk!" growled Pen Anderson. "Only explanation is that he wasn't really dead, and came back to life long enough to make us believe he was a corpse revived."

"And yet a heavy ray gun made no impression on him," the girl said.

PEN ANDERSON moistened his dry lips. "A jinx!" he whispered. "Mebbe Knife wasn't so far wrong at that!"

"Jinx!" Blackie repeated slowly, starting. He had suddenly remembered the note he had found. "Maybe you've got something there . . . First, let's get these two corpses outside. Fire 'em through the safety lock: that oughta stop any chance of them coming back to life!"

Between them, he and Pen dragged the bodies to the apparatus, slammed the percussion trap. Instantly the bodies were propelled into space outside. Bloated, grayish remains floated near the ship. Blackie watched them for a while, then a frown gathered slowly on his face.

"Say, that's queer! Those corpses are moving away from us! There is a stronger gravity somewheres— If it doesn't hold them in focus in this four-point hole, it can't hold us either!"

He spun round, jaw squared. "Conroy, what's the big idea? We *can* get free! This proves it—"

"I don't know how they come to be—"

Blackie elbowed Conroy roughly out of the way, seated himself at the controls and snatched the notes which Conroy had been making. He glanced at them, then his expression became fixed. Slowly from his pocket he dragged the note he had found in the provision chamber.

The writing exactly matched!

But Conroy had written under the imminent expectation of death, had been almost as good as dead when—

"What," Blackie asked ominously, "is the meaning of all this, Conroy? Blast you, spill it!" he finished with a roar.

Conroy looked at the warning message, then at his own notes. His lips

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compressed. But his face was still dull and expressionless. Before he could speak Pen Anderson gave a little gasp.

"Look!" he whispered, and his trembling hand pointed to a tremendous gash on the back of Conroy's head, the blood long since congealed. Up to now he had kept himself turned from revealing it. It seemed incredible that a man could move about, even live, with a wound like that. Even *live* . . . ?

"He's dead!" Pen shrieked, all his nerve snapping. "Dead! That's the meaning of the note! He *did* die—and all this time he's been alive again, holding us in this trap for reasons of his own—Blackie, I can't stand it!"

He wheeled, raced for the safety lock and climbed inside it. The moment he slammed the percussion cap upon himself the apparatus worked, hurled him as a dead gray corpse into the deeps outside.

Conroy's dead face seemed to come to life slowly as he gazed at the grim-faced Blackie and frightened girl.

"Okay, what's the set up?" Blackie whispered. "You're not scaring me with this return-to-life act— Nor Dots, here." He flashed a glance at her. "You deliberately anchored us with that phony four point sink hole angle. But it isn't true. We can get out!"

"Yes," Conroy admitted slowly, "you can escape—but first there is a proposition for you to consider. I can give you power, my friend—great power. I need an Earthling like you, one without any scruples. A criminal, to put it bluntly. And for that matter an Earth woman like this with no pretensions to sentiment would be an advantage."

BLACKIE and the girl looked at each other blankly: the girl indeed was looking indignant. Then Blackie snapped,

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about, but spill it just the same, and I'll tell you if I like it."

"Conroy," Conroy stated impartially, "has been dead for some time. He moves about not through his own will, but mine. I am a mind projection from Ildiban—a small, little known asteroid. My comrades and I are interested in the vast plunder that is obtainable on Earth, only we cannot reach that planet on account of its distance. I anchored the ship at this point because it is the limit to which my mind projection can reach. You see, we need ambassadors . . . We learned of this intended prison break through radio. It was decided I should take over the ship's pilot—Conroy. I did: killed him by shock. He fell and struck his head. Thereafter I have used his body, as I am doing now. But before he died he must have written that note, of which I knew nothing."

"You then were back of Rays Walford's revenge?" Blackie muttered.

"Certainly. I deserted this body of Conroy's for a time: you will recall he was apparently asleep? First I hypnotized this woman here to open the refrigerator: she imagined she had been asleep. Then I took over Walford's murdered body. I knew from the girl's mind all about who had killed Rays, about the minerals—everything . . . I had a dual motive in what I did. One was to exact necessary vengeance upon an unscrupulous criminal; and the other was to put the courage of the rest of you to the supreme test. Then I became Conroy again."

"I get it," Blackie said, after a long silence. "What you are trying to state is that you need a criminal to steal for you on Earth, and kick the proceeds in to you?"

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"I thought you would understand," Conroy nodded. "Your world indulges in such things: it is rich in treasure. You were sent to prison for trying to obtain some of that treasure. Here is your chance for supreme revenge! Become a master, under our dictates. Have this woman as your aide. In time, you might rule the Earth!"

Blackie rubbed his jaw, then he grinned.

"Can you beat it, Dots! A mental monster from Ildiban wants to become a big time crook like me! You can even find gangsters on Ildiban, sugar— No, damn you!" he blazed suddenly. "You're dead wrong! I escaped from that blasted prison to start going straight . . . well, nearly straight. Certainly to be my own master. I don't work for you or no guy from a two cent asteroid. See?"

"I should not like to think my work has been for nothing," Conroy's voice said slowly. "I eliminated the small time cowards, leaving you two. I can perhaps force you, even as I forced this girl, to do my bidding."

"No guy can force Blackie Melrose!" Blackie retorted.

WITH that Conroy stared steadily. To Blackie's vision it looked as though the dull eyes came to life for a while and he felt the full appalling onslaught of battering mental commands. He even reeled under them . . . Then the muscles of his face bunched into knots of iron determination. He clenched his fists, stared back . . . and all of a sudden the strain relaxed.

"Quite a pity," Conroy sighed. "You are too strong for me to break down. I was afraid of that. Maybe one of the others would have been better after all . . . No, no—not enough courage. This girl I could use only— No, not enough experience. You were the one, Blackie Melrose . . . You are *sure* you won't take the offer?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"Then I shall have to find others. . . ."

Conroy stopped speaking, his knees gave way and he thudded to the floor. Blackie stooped instantly, turned him over. Then he lifted an astounded face to the girl.

"That—that mental gangster, whatever it was, has withdrawn his influence," he whispered. "Deserted him!"

He digested the incredible fact for a moment.

"Give me anything but this," he panted. "I always knew space crawled with queer things, but mental body stealers— No, sir!" He got up, whirled the girl suddenly to him. "Look, Dots, you and me are going back to Earth. Maybe when we've taken care of Rays Walford's family there'll be something left over from those rocks. How 'bout it? Feel like ringing doorbells?"

"Uh-huh," she nodded tensely. "Besides, I could use a gorilla like you now and again at that . . ."

Blackie grinned, slammed in the rocket switches, and listened to the mounting roar that drove them forward . . .

THE END.

« RUNNING WILD »

CRESTED wheat grass, a wild prairie grass of the West, is one plant that really likes to spread out and go places. Its roots grow on an average of two miles a day in all directions. One plant was carefully watched for two years and then dug up. Its roots were sprayed and washed and each root was carefully charted on graph paper. All in all, the plant was found to have grown 320 miles of roots in the two years. —*A. Morris.*

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Romance of the Elements—

IRON-STUDDED NAVY! THE SHIPS OF HIERO, KING OF SYRACUSE (3RD CENTURY B.C.) HAD SIDES THAT BRISTLED WITH IRON SPIKES; ENGINES IN THE FIGHTING TOPS HURLED BARS OF IRON AT THE ENEMY. WHEN THE CELTIBERIANS OF ROMAN SPAIN MADE THEIR ULTRA-KEEN SWORDS THEY USED IRON RODS, LONG BURIED IN THE GROUND.

WORLD'S FIRST WELDER? POSSIBLY GLAUCUS OF CHIOS, GREECE. IN 560 B.C., HE WELDED IRON ON A SILVER VASE THAT WAS DEDICATED TO THE DELPHI ORACLE.

PRIMITIVE MAN'S FIRST IRON WAS DUG FROM IRON METEORS THOSE WE SEE HURTLING THRU SPACE ARE VIRTUALLY ALL IRON MIXED WITH SOME NICKEL. METEORS ARE SOMETIMES HUGE; THE EARTHS CORE, SAYS SCIENCE IS PROBABLY AN IRON-NICKEL ALLOY PARTLY IN MOLTEN FORM-

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN BUTCHERS OF THEBES CUT THEIR MEAT WITH IRON CLEAVERS. ARCHAEOLOGISTS UNCOVERED VESSELS OF THE METAL IN THE PYRAMID OF CHEOPS. BUT ASIATIC HITTITES, IT SEEMS, WERE FIRST TO SMELT IRON IN QUANTITY.

MIRACLE OF EARLY IRONWORK WAS THE CYLINDRICAL 6-TON PILLAR FASHIONED BY 4TH CENTURY HINDOO SMITHS FROM WROUGHT IRON! OLD-TIME CRAFTSMEN HAD ONLY WROUGHT IRON TO WORK WITH; THEIR SIMPLE FORGES LACKED SUFFICIENT HEAT TO TURN OUT MOLTEN IRON. CAST IRON DATES FROM ABOUT THE 14TH CENTURY WHEN SMELTERS OF THE RHINE VALLEY HEIGHTENED FURNACE CHIMNEYS; ACHIEVED GREATER DRAFT. BY 1595, BRITISH FOUNDERS WERE CASTING CANNON WEIGHING UP TO 3 TONS.

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—IRON

by GORDON A. MACLEAN
and ROD RUTH

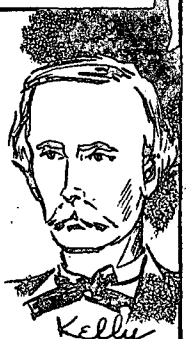
THIRTY FIVE YEARS BEFORE THE PILGRIM LANDING —— SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S EXPEDITION TO AMERICA DISCOVERED IRON IN NORTH CAROLINA; A CARGO OF ORE LEFT JAMESTOWN FOR ENGLAND IN THE YEAR 1608—

ALTHOUGH AMONG THE WORLD'S OLDEST AND MOST FAMILIAR METALS, IRON HAS YET TO BE PRODUCED COMMERCIALLY IN 100% PURE FORM! IRON PREPARED ELECTROLYTICALLY IN 1831 WAS LONG REGARDED AS A LABORATORY CURIOSITY. TODAY THEY GET "HIGH PURITY" IRON BY USING THIS PROCESS—!

CHARCOAL BURNERS WERE IMPORTANT UNTIL ABRAHAM DARBY OF ENGLAND IN 1735 LEARNED HOW TO TRANSFORM PIT COAL INTO COKE. ROBERT HUNTSMAN'S LINEAL DESCENDENTS STILL MAKE THE CRUCIBLE STEEL HE DEVELOPED 200 YEARS AGO! SOME SAY THAT ENGLAND OWED HER 19TH CENTURY COMMERCIAL LEADERSHIP TO HENRY CORT'S DRY PUDDLING PROCESS

Bessemer

IN THE 1850'S—HENRY BESSEMER SHOT HOT AIR INTO A CONVERTERFUL OF MOLTEN PIG IRON; ADDED CARBON, AND—PRESTO!—HE HAD STEEL IN MINUTES! LIKE MAGIC THIS CHEAP STEEL REPLACED IRON IN BRIDGE MATERIALS, RAILS, MANY TOOLS. IN AMERICA, ODDLY ENOUGH, WILLIAM KELLY DEVELOPED A SIMILAR METHOD INDEPENDENT OF BESSEMER. OPEN HEARTH FURNACES MAKE HIGH GRADE STEEL; THEY "COOK" IRON OR STEEL SCRAP, LIQUID PIG IRON, MOLTEN BESSEMER STEEL.



Kelly

IRON is number 26 in the International Table of Atomic Weights and its symbol is Fe. Its atomic weight is 55.84; its density is 7.86; melting point 1530°. Pure iron is a silvery color. Its ores (principal) are Hematite, Limonite, Magnetite, Siderite. It is principally made into pig iron, wrought iron, steel.

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Mr. Ames' Devil

Mr. Ames didn't really want to conjure up a devil, but the incantation worked, and there he was, determined to act like a devil!

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"My name is Zebub.
I'm at your service."

by AUGUST W. DERLETH

SHERWOOD AMES was an amiable little man whom nobody looked at twice. It was not his fault; he had nothing distinguishing about him, and neither had his parents. Somewhere in his early years, however, Mr. Ames had picked up some knowledge of wizardry, and secretly, he often convinced himself that he was an adept at black arts and summoning devils.

Mr. Ames, however, had never really summoned a devil.

Until one night in mid-summer when he had nothing better to do. He constructed all the designs he had learned, took his place in the middle, and did all the mumbo-jumbo he was supposed to do. He was both surprised and shocked at his success. He had hardly uttered his last syllables before there

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was a flash of fire, an overwhelming odor of brimstone, and there was Mr. Ames' Devil. He was pint-size, to be sure, but Mr. Ames himself was not a giant.

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Ames thoughtlessly.

The imp grimaced and informed Mr. Ames that he was being extremely distasteful. He went on to inquire why Ames needed a personal devil, since he had been having things pretty much his own way insofar as his meager demands on life were concerned. Besides, complained the imp, he had personally been having a good time making things hot for a couple of sinners in Vichy.

"In that case," said Mr. Ames agreeably, "I'll send you back."

"Impossible," said the devil.

Mr. Ames remained agreeable. He explained that he had just wanted to summon a devil; he had not really believed he could do it.

Firmly the devil pointed out to Mr. Ames that he had gone through the accepted ritual for summoning a personal devil, and there was now nothing for it but to keep him on. "My name is Zebub," concluded the imp. "I'm something in the line of Beelzebub."

"All the same, Zebub, I'm going to send you back," said Mr. Ames cordially. "I really have no use for a devil."

"Oh, you could use me," said Zebub. "I could see to that."

"No, you'll have to go back," said Mr. Ames firmly.

Zebub shook his head and hopped around quite agilely to a comfortable position astride Mr. Ames' instep. "Quite impossible," he said. "I may like it here."

"I may have forgotten the words," agreed Mr. Ames uncomfortably.

"Even if you haven't forgotten," said Zebub.

Mr. Ames thought hard, and the words came back. He said them faithfully and performed the prescribed ritual. Nothing whatever happened. Zebub had gone over to the window and looked out.

"You see," he said over his shoulder. "That ritual's no good any more. It's been outlawed. By the union."

"What union?"

"The Personal Devils' Union, Local Number 7. Really, Mr. Ames, for a summoner of devils, you're not up to date. The fact is, the moment we organized, we made it impossible to discharge any one of us without due and sufficient cause."

Mr. Ames was aghast. "You mean you're going to stay?"

"Certainly."

MR. AMES did not know what to say. He was even farther from knowing what to do. He looked dubiously at Zebub and contemplated his future. What would people say? After all, he had his position in Tattersall, Swithin & Ames to think about. What would old Tattersall say? Contemplating the head of the firm, Mr. Ames began to perspire.

"No," said Ames firmly, shaking his head, "it won't do. It can't be done. Why, just think, I'll be asked all sorts of embarrassing questions, and what will I say?"

"I see your point," said Zebub. "Naturally, I don't hold with telling them the truth—but in this case, they would believe you were telling a preposterous lie, and the resulting slander and libel in malicious gossip might well be profitable—from my point of view."

"Never!"

Zebub shrugged. "The trouble with you is, you have no imagination. I suppose I can always make myself invisible."

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"Well, that might be different."

Zebub obligingly vanished. His voice, however, was not gone. It was as commanding as ever. "I'm really still here," he said. He went on to point out that arrangements ought to be made at once; he would sleep next to the fireplace — "It reminds me of home."—he would spend all the rest of his time at Mr. Ames' elbow, ready to serve. "Service is our motto, Mr. Ames, but please try to leave the deity out of your conversation as much as possible. You have no idea how mention of him sends cold shivers up my spine."

"I didn't know devils had feelings."

"Of course we have," said Zebub in an injured voice. "Thank Satan, however, we're not entirely human. Only a few of us have sunk to that level of degradation to suffer the punishment of being banished to earth to become human—like Hitler, for instance. The only trouble with him is with his methods, he sends more business to the other place."

Mr. Ames swallowed hard in an effort to convince himself he was not, after all, dreaming. Zebub's voice came out of the air beside him; the imp had moved over closer to the fireplace, and now spoke from there. It was inconceivable that he should have succeeded in his little experiment; it was monstrous that he should now be saddled with Zebub. Deep down in his rather simple mind, he had never really believed he could summon a demon. But he had. He had raised Zebub out of the Pit, and here he was, a permanent addition to the household, which consisted only of Mr. Ames and a woman who did the place.

The whole thing was beyond reason. He could take the devil in his stride, given a month or so in which to do it, but all this talk about the Personal Devils' Union and the rules and regulations of that union was too much for him; it was not fair; it was not in the books. Somehow he had been put upon.

Zebub made himself visible again, quite abruptly. He was standing in the middle of the fire, toasting himself a brilliant crimson. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked. "After all —we aim to serve. Anyone whose neck you want broken, for instance?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Mr. Ames, honestly shocked.

"Tch, tch! How disappointing! Remember, you have only to wish, and I'll see what I can do."

Forthwith he disappeared once more. It did not add to Mr. Ames' comfort to become aware of the strong odor of brimstone and sulphur that tainted the air.

WHEN he did not see Zebub for twenty-four hours, Mr. Ames began to think he had been a little hasty to respond to his visit by despairing for his future; it began to seem that Zebub had indeed taken his departure, union or no union, and he was free of him. He breathed easier, and made a determined effort to forget him.

In a week's time, Mr. Ames had quite regained his self-composure. He was convinced that Zebub had given him up as a bad job and taken French leave, and he began to look back on his summoning of Zebub as a pleasantly dangerous episode, much as the errant husband looks back on his straying when it is quite safe to do so.

Unfortunately, his composure was premature. He had made the mistake of not taking the devil at his word, and unlike what he might have expected from that notorious purveyor of prevarications, the devil's word was as good as his bond. Zebub had promised not to leave him; he had said nothing of mak-

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ing a nuisance of himself. As a matter of fact, he was profoundly bored with his existence and spent most of each day enjoying his memory of the Vichy sinners.

Ultimately, of course, Mr. Ames was destined for a rude awakening. This took place on the ninth day after Zebub had first made his appearance. It had been a trying day, and old Tattersall was in one of his worst moods. There was no doubt about the old man's ability to be the most disagreeable person on the face of the earth if he had a mind to. On that day he very definitely had. He ranted and stormed and called repeatedly upon heaven to witness the mental infirmities of his partners and the staff. He made things so miserable for Ames, whose chief happiness lay in being unobtrusive, that Ames was fervently convinced there was not another martinet like Old T. in all Chicago. Or even New York. In any case, the upshot of his misery was that Ames left the office that evening in a cold rage. I wish the old fool were on the Styx! he thought.

"How's that again?" asked a voice.

"I wish old Tattersall were on the Styx," said Ames, thinking one of the junior clerks had spoken to him.

"Now, that's something like it!"

Young Ruston, coming up behind him, said, "I guess everybody but Swithin feels the same way."

Mr. Ames was comforted.

His comfort lasted less than an hour. He had hardly got home when the telephone rang. It was Mr. Swithin, begging to inform Mr. Ames dolefully that Mr. Tattersall had been struck and killed by a Wilson Avenue bus at a street intersection. Mr. Swithin was now head of the firm, Mr. Ames its junior, and young Mr. Tattersall, the old man's nephew, would replace Mr. Ames.

Ames was not a man given to belief in coincidences. He was badly shaken when he retired to his favorite chair and, swallowing hard, ventured weakly to address Zebub.

"Yes?"

There he was, in his preferred position smack in the middle of the fire, twitching his tail to and fro, his complexion a deep rose. He looked sleek and happy, and just at the moment seemed very well satisfied with himself.

"You called, I believe?"

"You've been here, then—all the time?"

"At your elbow except for the time you sent me on that errand."

"What errand?"

"To take care of Mr. Tattersall."

"I said I wanted him on the Styx—not pushed in front of a bus. That's what you did, isn't it?" Mr. Ames' anger vied with his hysteria.

"It was really nothing. He pushed very easily." Zebub smiled modestly.

"But that's murder!"

"How did you think we could get him to where you wanted him? We couldn't transfer him bodily. That's against all the rules and regulations. Oh, I know we used to do it back in the middle ages. We snaffled a bishop or two that way. But really, Old Timer, it's not being done these days. Help them to shuffle off their mortal coil, and then—pouf!" he snapped his fingers and grinned engagingly, "it's done. Right now Old T. is enjoying himself on a houseboat on the Styx—you knew John Kendrick Bangs has one there."

Mr. Ames gritted his teeth and muttered, "I'm dreaming this."

"No, it's just your lack of imagination."

Ames closed his eyes tightly.

"You needn't do that," protested Zebub, and obligingly vanished. "It

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really makes no difference whether you see me or whether you don't. Considering your state of mind, I think you'd feel better if you didn't see me."

There was a pause. Mr. Ames opened one eye warily. Zebub was gone. He expelled a breath cautiously and opened the other eye.

"Another thing," said Zebub's voice out of the fire, "I wish you wouldn't call me like this unless you really have something for me to do."

Mr. Ames gave forth a strangled gasp and fled the house.

HE WALKED for a long time around Lincoln Park, but the walk was no comfort to him. He thought and thought about how to get rid of Zebub, but nothing presented itself to him. There was always one alternative—he could go to see MacDougal, the psychic researcher who was a member of his own Club—but he hesitated to do so lest Mac, who was a congenial old soul, think he had lost his mind. He went home at last, unhappy.

He conditioned himself to living with the threat of Zebub. That was the way he thought of the imp; since he did not see him, and did not hear him, he considered him an omnipresent threat rather than a reality. He conditioned himself very simply by taking strict care that he wish no one any trouble, no matter how hard-pressed his patience might be.

He never knew how he got through those first few days. He had gone to old Tattersall's funeral in a pall of gloom so deep that he thought everyone would notice; his gloom only superficially covered his air of guilt. But no one seemed to pay any attention to him, and his spirits lifted a little; he felt a little less like a murderer and that evening simply hurried past newspaper pictures of gangsters instead of sitting and staring at them and imagining that he was a brother under the skin. But somehow he managed to overcome that dreadful conviction of guilt, and after two months or so he could almost forget it. He might have forgotten it completely had it not been for his superior position in the firm; there was always that to remind him that Old T. was no more and that his position in the world had altered. More than once even then he caught himself wondering what Old T. did to pass the time on that houseboat on the Styx.

But of course, even with every good reason in the world, it could not be expected that any man—least of all, a man like Mr. Ames—could hold himself in, especially with Herbert Swithin around. Old T. had been bad enough; but there was really no comparison. Swithin was insufferable; after being held down for so many years by Old T., Swithin now made up for all his lost time, and doubled up on it. All at the expense of Ames and the staff. Nagging, fault-finding, querulousness, a dictator complex—all these and more, poor Ames suffered.

No one could really blame him for giving vent to his spleen by calling down a pox on Swithin.

So Herbert Swithin got the pox, and with a vengeance.

It was Zebub's doings; there was never a question of that in Ames' mind. He hurried home that day, after learning at the office the reason for Swithin's absence, and summoned Zebub.

"Now what?" demanded the imp. "Isn't my work satisfactory?"

"Well, no. Only, you've taken me too literally."

Zebub grinned and wagged his tail. "Oh, not at all. Mr. Swithin will be gathered in next Monday. He will have a nice warm spot."

"You don't mean—he's to die?"

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"Don't be obtuse, Mr. Ames. Of course he is. I read your heart when you called down that pox." He smirked. "Now you'll be head of the firm, and since that is soon to be a fact, there's a little matter I've been meaning to bring up. I've not really been paid, you know, and it's about time for an accounting."

"Paid!" shouted Ames, almost beside himself. "What are you talking about? It's enough that I'm at fault in this business of murder—an accessory before and after . . ."

"Oh, posh! Don't moralize. You've no idea how tiresome that is for a person of my connections. To get back to the point—my remuneration. You must admit I've served you well. Now, then, Swithin has no heirs; so your nephew can step into young Tattersall's place, when you two are moved up."

"I have no nephew."

"Oh, you will have. I'll serve. I'll make the change. I've long thought it would be much more fun to have a really active part in a legal firm. The chances of chicanery are very good—I've observed them repeatedly from the vantage point of my invisibility. Something ought to be made of them. As it is, you're all too disgustingly honest."

Ames thought Zebub was joking. When finally the imp had persuaded Mr. Ames that he was most certainly in earnest, Ames was in no condition to argue. Indeed, he commanded Zebub to disappear and himself went out, hailed a cab, and was driven down town.

IT WAS only too clear that Zebub's long inactivity was getting the best of him. Just as it would undoubtedly get the best of Ames if something weren't done immediately. Like it or not, he had to see MacDougal.

He went straight to the Cliffdwellers' and there was old Mac, playing chess and talking politics with a couple of architects. As soon as the game was finished—after two agonizing hours—he managed to corner Mac.

"You look ill, Ames. What is it?" Mac was solicitous, his watery blue eyes grave.

Out came Ames' story in a burst of extraordinary frankness. He bared his soul for MacDougal, and the old man did not once interrupt. His face betrayed his surprise, however, but, as far as Ames could see, there was no great disbelief. That was one major obstacle hurdled. Now what to do?

"That should be quite simple," replied MacDougal ingratiatingly. "You will have to change your status."

"My status? But how would that affect Zebub and his infernal union regulations?"

"Ah, don't you see? If you cease to be an employer, and become an employee instead, the rules won't apply to him any more."

"But how . . ."

"That's Formula 73. Just look it up. You'll just have to join the union, what was it?—the Personal Devils' Union, Local Number 7, I think you said."

Mr. Ames was delighted at this simple way out. He hurried home forthwith and looked up the formula.

"I wouldn't pay any attention to that old fogy," cautioned Zebub.

"Naturally, *you* wouldn't!" chortled Ames.

"Just the same . . ."

"Now, see here, Zebub. As long as you're in my service, you'll do as I say. And I'm telling you to hold your tongue."

Zebub switched his tail angrily and held his tongue, withal grinning sardonically.

Mr. Ames got himself ready. He laid out all the cabalistic designs, and began to recite the formula which would ad-

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mit him to membership in the Personal Devils' Union and at the same time rid him of Zebub.

Unfortunately for Mr. Ames, he forgot that membership in the Personal Devils' Union entailed certain responsibilities and put him under the same rules and regulations which governed Zebub.

Zebub disappeared as the last words of Formula 73 were uttered.

So did Mr. Ames.

HOT WEATHER APPETITE

MOST of us are content with a luncheon salad and iced tea when the temperature soars in the summer. But not so with our friends, the fishes. In warm weather they require more food than they do in cool weather.

Bluegills, pumpkinseeds and large-mouthed black bass were used in an experiment to determine their food habits at different temperatures. Fishes which had been living in glass tanks of about 68 degrees Fahrenheit were tested for a week at that temperature. They were then changed to a temperature of 50 degrees where they were kept for about four weeks and then transferred back to the original temperature for two weeks more.

From these and similar tests it was learned that a sudden loss of appetite occurred at the time of transfer from the warmer to the cooler water, the amount of food consumed falling to about one-third the original amount. When put back in the warmer water, their rate of food consumption increased again so that within two weeks they equalled or exceeded their original rate.

It was also noted that young fishes ate much more in proportion to their size than the older fishes. For example, the yearling pumpkinseed ate about one-sixteenth of its body weight per day at 68 degrees F., while the two-year-olds consumed on the average, only about one-fiftieth of their body weight per day.

Another similar experiment showed that fish do not appreciate sunshine. Ultra-violet radiation may be a boon to mankind, but to the fish it is often fatal. Sunlight is definitely harmful to them. Almost twice as many young fish died in troughs of water exposed to direct sunlight as those in troughs in the shade.

☆ ☆ ☆

THE FRIENDLY SWALLOW

"WHEN the swallows come back to Capistrano," may be a popular song but the thoughts contained therein are based on sound facts.

Swallows actually fly homeward in the springtime and set about in earnest to find homes for themselves and the families they will rear during the summer.

The first swallow to fly homeward is the tree swallow, nicknamed the "telegraph-wire" swallow, for it will not roost in a tree as long as it can find a wire. Telegraph and telephone wires abounding with these slim, twittering birds are a very common sight all over the country. Practically the only food of these birds are the insects. Having very short and wide beaks, the swallows, darting swiftly through the air, catch many slow-flighted insects such as beetles and mosquitoes.

These birds are very friendly little creaures, showing little fear of man and willingly accepting the birdhouses built for them. They are sociable and like to live with one another.

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CAN THEY TAKE IT?

EMBRYOS of the little brine shrimp species known as Artemia have powers of resistance worth elaborating on. In the encysted state, a certain condition in which the young shrimp survive hard seasons, they have been kept sealed in glass tubes under high-vacuum conditions for six months. That whole length of time they had no oxygen, yet when the glass was broken and the embryos placed in strong brine they proceeded to develop as if nothing had deferred their progress. Other embryos were able to go on with their development after a 24-hour immersion in liquid air, at a temperature of 310 degrees below zero.

New tests are being made against time. Encysted embryos are being kept in jars which will be opened at five-year intervals to determine how long the embryos can live in this state of suspended animation.

Lakes of concentrated brine, saltier than sea water, such as Mono Lake and Salt Lake in the U. S. and the Dead Sea in Palestine harbor the Artemia.

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Creegar pushed frantically at the heavy door as the tube-car hurtled toward him.

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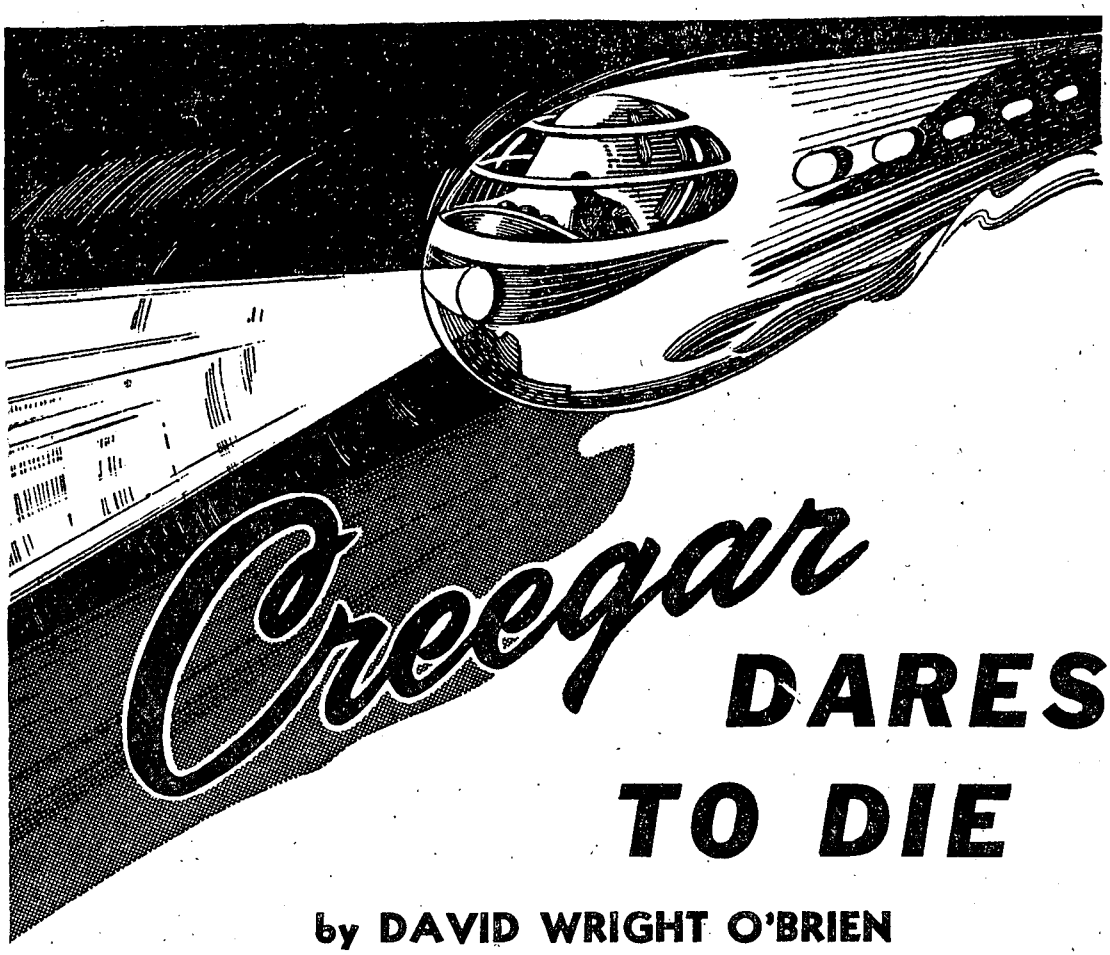

Creegar DARES TO DIE

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Death meant nothing to Creegar when he came out of prison. He had something to do, and he did it!

CREEGAR felt the cold wind on his face as he stepped across the threshold of the great doors and stood at last outside.

Five years ago he might have wept.

Five years ago he might reasonably have buried his head in his hands and sobbed forth the torrents of bewildered bitterness that welled inside him.

But now, save for a slight squinting against the whipping blasts of cold, there was no trace of emotion in the bitter, gray young face. There was no kindling of any spark behind those coal black eyes. No expression of any sort in that tightly set young jaw.

One of the guards, gray faced and bulky in a drab blue tunic, nervously touched the holstered atomic pistol hanging at his side and shuffled closer to a companion to whisper something the wind carried to Creegar's ears.

"A bad one, that youngster. He'll break his exile and soon be back here to die. I'll lay you odds."

Not even in Creegar's coal black eyes was there any indication that he had heard. Instead he buried his toil calloused hands deep into the pockets of his coarse gray tunic and spread his feet a little as he stood there waiting

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for them to bring his stake.

An orderly from the warden appeared beside him a moment later.

"Creegar?" the orderly asked.

It was the first time Thorne Creegar had heard his name spoken in five years. And for a flickering instant he felt as though a choking lump in his throat would betray him. Then the emotion that had almost rocked him from his shell of granite vanished.

"Yes," Creegar said tonelessly.

"This belongs to you," the orderly said briefly. "Good luck and goodbye." He placed a rough, bulky duffle bag in Creegar's arms and turned away.

His stake. Regulations back inside those bleak gray walls provided that every convict released from the interplanetary penal bases was entitled to a stake on discharge. An extra set of cheap tunic clothing, a personal kit, enough money to take him off the penal planet and keep him drunk for several weeks after that.

The guards were moving back to their stations before the doors. Creegar

Creegar started down the rocky hill

felt their eyes watching him. He turned for an instant, staring full at the gaunt, gray walls that had held him from the rest of the world those five terrible years.

Hatred, hard and scorching, flamed into his coal black eyes for an instant. Then it was gone, and Creegar, throwing his duffle bag over his shoulder, turned away and started down the rocky hill that led to the dirty space wharfs a mile below—

IN THE large, luxuriously furnished drawing room of the magnificent seashore residence, a girl stood before the huge, wall-sized window that looked over the vast blue expanse of tranquil ocean.

She was a slim girl, with raven hair that fell straight to her soft shoulders, delicate, beautiful features, and luminous hazel eyes. She wore a tunic gown of a soft, saffron, slightly metallic fabric.

Utterly motionless, she stood there, staring out at the ocean below her unseeingly, her mind a million miles away.

Apparently she didn't hear the door open behind her at the other end of the room. And it wasn't until the massive red faced, gray haired man stepped across the threshold into the room and closed the door behind him that she was aware of his intrusion.

And then she turned, slowly.

The massive, red faced intruder smiled, teeth very white, and started toward her, walking with the swift agility of a jungle cat for all his tremendous size.

"Are you still being silly about him, Sherry?" the man asked. Beneath the pleasant basso of his heavy voice there was an iron controlled rage.

"You haven't lied to me, Judson? He will be released today?" the girl called Sherry asked. Her voice was like her beauty, warm, rich and honest.

The man she called Judson stood

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before her now, still smiling. He placed his big hands on her shoulders.

"I didn't go back on our bargain, Sherry. I told you I wouldn't," he answered.

The girl seemed to tremble slightly, shudderingly, beneath the large hands on her shoulders.

"And there's no one waiting for him as he leaves today," Sherry said dully.

"But he's free," Judson's voice broke in, the tinge of anger growing.

"Yes, he's free, poor Thorne. Free and alone, and filled with bitterness," Sherry said.

"The bargain has been carried through on my part, Sherry," the massive Judson reminded her. "Now we'll make the arrangements for our wedding. Forget Thorne Creegar. Forget him forever, do you hear?"

"I'll never forget Thorne," Sherry said. "That wasn't part of the bargain, Judson. I'll marry you, but I told you before that I'll never forget Thorne."

Judson's hands tightened on her shoulders for an instant before he took them away. He stood back. The grip of his powerful fingers had left white marks on Sherry's shoulders that were now turning red.

"I understood all that. We covered that ground before," he declared! "But you'd be wiser, for your own peace of mind, to make the best of our bargain."

Sherry's small hands tightened into fists, her nails biting into her palms.

"I'm making the best of it, Judson. Thorne is free, at least. That's what I wanted. Don't worry about my part of the bargain. I'll see it through. Within ten days I'll be Mrs. Judson Bellham." She was fighting back tears. Her lower lip trembled over the last few words.

Judson Bellham smiled unpleasantly. "That's correct, Sherry. You'll see it through, and I'll spend my life making you forget him. I promise you that much."

The girl turned her head away.

"Please," she said softly, "please go now, Judson. I, I don't feel as if I can talk about it any more at present. I—"

Bellham's voice was hard. "Very well, Sherry. I'll leave if you wish. But Thorne Creegar was, and is, a killer. The Court of Justice proved that much. It was only for your sake that I used my influence to have him released earlier than he should have been."

Sherry's voice was shaken, anguished. "The Court of Justice found him guilty, I know that. But he is innocent, Judson. I am sure of it. I, I, would stake my life on it. But for what you've done, I'll try to make you a good wife, if that's what you wish."

JUDSON BELLHAM'S voice went silken. "Sherry, you'll understand eventually. I can make you forget him. I *will* make you forget him. As my wife, legally, there will be more I can do to help you. More I can do to wipe out your unfortunate memory of Creegar. I'm not a fool, Sherry. I know that you are marrying me only because it was part of the bargain I arranged in return for my aiding Thorne Creegar. Perhaps I played my cards bluntly, even harshly, Sherry. But I'm a hard man. I know only one kind of game when I'm after a prize. But all I want is the chance to prove, as your husband, that I can bring happiness back to you, that I can erase the blot that Creegar left on your life."

Sherry looked at him dully, making no attempt to conceal the tears that dimmed her hazel eyes.

"You'll understand some day," Judson Bellham concluded. "I know you will."

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"But he's so alone, so completely alone," Sherry said faintly, unhearingly.

Judson Bellham fought back a sudden surge of red rage. With difficulty he kept his mouth smiling.

"I'll see you at dinner, Sherry," he said. He turned then, and swiftly strode to the door.

Sherry still stood there motionless until the door closed behind Judson Bellham. Then softly, achingly, she began to sob . . .

THE fat, blue jowled Venusian space cargo ship captain, stood in the inspection office at *Balhaka,** rolling a rank cigar around in his puffy lips.

The customs inspector of *Balhaka,* who sat behind the desk the captain faced, was small, lean, bald and firmly crisp in his manner.

"I am very sorry, captain," he declared. "You cannot discharge any penal exiles in our port. Those are orders."

"But I did not know that when he took passage at his penal planet," the Venusian captain protested. "He is only one man, after all. Here at *Balhaka* he will perhaps be able to obtain employment in your duralloy mines. I cannot keep him aboard my ship forever!"

The customs inspector shook his head with crisp finality. "There are other planetary outposts where you may drop him. But *Balhaka* is restricted against his kind. He is no more welcome here than he would be at Earth."

"But what am I to do with him?" the Venusian space freighter captain protested.

The customs inspector shrugged. "He has been discharged from a Federation penal planet. All such discharged convicts are thereafter banished from Earth, or any planets under its Federation's direct control for the rest of their lives. Take him anywhere else, captain, but Earth and the Federation planets, such as *Balhaka,* want no part of him."

The captain sighed in defeat.

"He was told," the customs inspector stated flatly, "that his return to Earth, or to any Federation territory, will be punished by his immediate return to the penal planet from which he was discharged, or, in extreme cases, in his death."

The captain shrugged, turned, and waddled toward the door. It was going to be increasingly difficult to tell his passenger, the young man with the gaunt gray face, and the bitter, coal black eyes, that he had again been tagged as a pestilence and was unwanted. These Earthmen had stupid systems and laws. Why, if their convicts were thus treated on release, didn't they save themselves time and worry by killing them in the first place? In Venus there would be no such stupidity.

When the Venusian space Skipper returned to his ship, a dirty little space-radio operator handed him a communication slip. On it was a brief, cryptic message.

> "Communicate with me immediately in regard additional cargo but recently acquired. Have plan for disposal of same.
>
> J. D. B."

Waddling thoughtfully into the narrow quarters of his dirty stateroom, the Venusian captain arched his very black eyebrows in curious contempla-

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* *Balhaka*—A small planetary outpost located on the fringe of the space penal planet belt. A duralloy mining center, operated by Earth Federation, and thus under its immediate jurisdiction.

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tion of the message. . . .

CHAPTER II

Bellham Builds a Frame

JUDSON BELLHAM drummed his heavy, well manicured fingers on the shining surface of his *platenoid* desk impatiently. After a minute of this, he reached for the button of the *telaboard* that gleamed at his elbow, and flicked it up.

A girl's face appeared on the suddenly silvered screen of the *telaboard*. Her lips moved.

"Yes, commissioner?"

"How about Hudge, has he come in yet?" Bellham demanded.

"No, commissioner. But the moment that he does, I'll send him in to you," the girl replied. "He said he'd be back at this time."

"Do that," Bellham snapped.

He flicked off the switch below the *telaboard* screen, and the secretary's face faded off. Bellham leaned back in his chair then, and reached for a thick brochure of papers that lay before him on the desk. He picked it up, and idly began to thumb through it.

Electrotyped on the cover of the brochure, was the heading:

"The Creegar Case"

The reports in the brochure were lengthy, detailed. But Bellham could have closed his eyes and recited the details by memory. For they were, after all, the implications and webs that he had cunningly evolved and skillfully woven together single-handedly. The snares and situations which he had personally conceived to send Thorne Creegar off to the penal planets.

It had not been an easy job. For as commissioner of law, Bellham himself had been very much in the public eye. He'd had to work with the utmost caution, the greatest secrecy, to railroad Creegar into the trap he had set for him. And Creegar, as a consular officer serving under Bellham in the Law Commission, had presented a prey exceptionally difficult to stalk.

Thorne Creegar had, for a time, been Bellham's right hand man. The Federation officials had looked on the young consular officer as a man with a brilliant future, great promise. It had taken quite a little while for Bellham to maneuver, ever so subtly, Creegar into duties away from his post as Bellham's sub-lieutenant.

But even as Bellham had cleverly assigned young Creegar to jobs farther and farther afield from him, he had worked skillfully toward his ultimate purpose. And by the time he had finally maneuvered Creegar into precisely the situation he wanted, Bellham had cunningly contrived to keep himself totally out of the proceedings that brought the young consular officer before the Court of Justice.

It had been another consular officer, one Lee Hudge, who had started the investigation of Thorne Creegar's case. And the tipoff that started Hudge in his relentless prosecution had come—even though Hudge himself was unaware of it—from Bellham.

Even in this detail, Bellham had worked with magnificent cunning. For there was no more relentless, thoroughly merciless officer in the Law Commission than Lee Hudge. Hudge was cold, an instrument of steel, brutal and uncompromising. And he held an instinctive hatred for Thorne Creegar.

He had gone after Creegar tooth and nail, disregarding food and sleep until he'd carried through his prosecution of his young fellow consular officer. And as the circumstantial evidence Bellham had so deftly planted against Creegar became more and more apparent to

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Lee Hudge, the relentless fury with which he waged his prosecution became more intense.

Hudge had been certain of Creegar's guilt. And this certainty served to give him his first concrete self excuse for his hatred of Creegar. For if there was the recognition of God in the soul of Lee Hudge, that God was Law and Order. It was his very life, his single driving purpose—the service of the God of Justice.

The fact that Hudge had spent his youth in bitter struggle; alone, orphaned at six, and been kicked about the interplanetary wharfs unmercifully during his early years until the time he'd finally joined the Federation Police as a terribly earnest and doggedly determined rookie, was part of the background that had forged him into the uncompromising slave of justice that he now was.

AND his same early years of pain and privation, struggle and near starvation, had been additionally instrumental in forging the instinctive hatred he held for Thorne Creegar. For Creegar had been the product of a wealthy environment, an exclusive university. Creegar's youth and his had been at exactly opposite poles.

Thorne Creegar had been appointed to the post of consular officer in the Law Commission on his graduation from the exclusive university. Lee Hudge, on the other hand, had served with the Federation Law Commission for fifteen years, starting at the very bottom as a private in the Space Police Forces. He had fought and bled and lived for the day when he finally won his promotion to consular officer.

And Creegar, though brilliantly deserving of his post, had stirred an instinctive and deep-rooted hatred in Lee Hudge's steel heart by so easily attaining all that Hudge had been forced to battle for.

THERE were other reasons, too, Bellham reflected, for Hudge's hatred of Creegar. Hudge, of course, served justice and the Law Commission like a slave. It was a vital part of his very being. Justice was the one tangible element he could cling to in a life that had been brutally marked by the world's injustice to the child, Lee Hudge. Justice, cold, hard, unyielding, had been his master. And the fact that Creegar served this same master with such brilliant ease and at the same time could maintain another rich and social life, was more than Hudge could understand. This lack of understanding welled into bitterness.

Bellham put the brochure back on the desk, still smiling as he recalled Lee Hudge's cold, almost insatiate fury when he began to suspect that Thorne Creegar was not serving his god justice honorably.

That Thorne Creegar could be guilty of besmirching the mantle of justice, the mantle Hudge wore with fanatic worship, made Hudge's prosecution of the case Bellham had framed around Creegar even more relentlessly bitter. And this wrathful vengeance further served Bellham's purpose in that it kept the chance of Hudge's ever suspecting the case as a frame-up as negligible. For Hudge was an excellent hound of the law, and if he hadn't been quite so fanatical in his pursuit of Creegar, he might possibly have scented trickery and fraud even in the cunningly planted circumstantial evidence Bellham had woven around his prey.

And Hudge had never once had an inkling that he was prosecuting an innocent man. In the bitterness and cold steel of his uncompromising mind and heart, Lee Hudge had never doubted

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that the tangled web of evidence leading to Creegar's imprisonment was anything but genuine.

Thinking back on that prosecution, Bellham felt smug satisfaction in the realization of how perfectly he had trapped Thorne Creegar.

Bellham still smiled as he recalled his own feigned shock, horror, and amazement when Lee Hudge had come to him to demand a prosecution of Creegar. Bellham had even called Creegar in, after he had been held for trial, to talk to him.

"But I want to help you, Thorne," Bellham had told the bewilderedly defiant Creegar. "I can't believe that you are guilty, completely. There must have been extenuating circumstances to explain your actions. Tell them to me, Thorne, and I'll do my very best for you."

Bellham had appeared at the Court of Justice to speak in Thorne Creegar's behalf. Deliberately, he had let his testimony be brought around to matters which, reluctantly, he had to admit served only to be all the more damning to young Creegar.

Lee Hudge, never more effective in prosecuting a case before his beloved Court of Justice, had demanded the ultimate penalty for Thorne Creegar's crimes.

He had almost been given his request. Almost, that is, until Judson Bellham reappeared dramatically to plead for some slight leniency for Creegar. That plea, plus the fact that Bellham had involved Creegar only deeply enough to suit his purposes, saved his young ex-consular officer's life. It cut the penal planet sentence which Thorne Creegar was given to ten years, and a lifetime exile when the sentence was served.

No one who witnessed or heard of that dramatic plea failed to be impressed. Bellham, to the very hilt of his treacherous stab, had enacted his role excellently.

Even Sherry Bennet had been impressed and tearfully grateful.

Sherry and Thorne were to have been married shortly after the trap was sprung on Creegar.

And Bellham's perfidy had, just as he'd intended it would, torn those plans of marriage asunder. For Bellham wanted Sherry himself. Wanted her badly enough to have engaged in the treacherous betrayal he conceived. For nothing had ever blocked Bellham's way to what he wanted for long. And it was merely unfortunate for Thorne Creegar that he happened to be standing in the way of Bellham's ruthless desire to have Sherry Bennet.

Thorne Creegar had been grim lipped, white faced, and stunned. Sherry had been sobbingly inconsolable, then dully anguished. Bellham expected that. He had foreseen the results of his scheme, and had counted heavily on time playing into his hands. Time with Creegar behind the grim gray walls of a penal planet. Time with Sherry to console. Time, five years of it, to begin to build the impression that he was at last convinced of Creegar's guilt, and that it was no more than his duty to convince Sherry that she must forget the young man who had been torn from her.

Here his plans had not materialized as well as he had expected.

He had driven Thorne Creegar from his path, but he couldn't remove the faith for him which Sherry Bennet held in her heart.

Few men ever survived ten years on a penal planet. A young man like Thorne Creegar might live through six, seven, even eight. Most of the few who emerged from the grim silence of those walls had left sanity behind them.

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Sherry Bennet was willing to do anything for Thorne's release. Willing, even, to promise to try to forget him, and to pledge her hand in marriage to Judson Bellham.

And with that pledge, Bellham had again pulled wires, manipulating the release, after five years, of Thorne Creegar.

BELLHAM'S reflections were suddenly jarred by the buzzing of the *telaboard* on his desk. He leaned forward and snapped the switch below its screen panel.

His secretary's face appeared on the silver screen.

"Consular Officer Lee Hudge has come in, Commissioner," she declared.

Judson Bellham nodded in satisfaction.

"Fine, send him into me immediately."

He snapped off the switch and the face faded from the screen. He picked up the brochure on the desk and leaned back in his Venusian red leather chair.

Thorne Creegar was free again, and even though he was forever condemned to exile, Bellham was going to take care of him for once and for all. He was putting Hudge back on Creegar's trail. . . .

CHAPTER III

Building a Snare

IN THE smoky quarters of the captain's cabin aboard the tramp Venusian space freighter, two men faced one another across a makeshift table of *duralloy* planking.

One sat on a scarred and battered bunk, and he was fat, blue jowled, and wearing a dirty uniform tunic indicating his position as master of the void vessel.

He was the Venusian captain who had faced the Customs Inspector at *Balhaka* some seven hours previously.

The other, considerably younger and very much leaner, wore a rough gray tunic. He sat on a weatherbeaten stool of platenoid composition, firmly bolted into the floor. His face was grim and unsmiling, his eyes coal black and burning with hard bitterness.

"I've taken a fancy to you, boy."

A bottle of cheap Venusian rum lay on the duralloy plank between them. It was a round bottle, and squatted toadlike between the two half-filled glasses on either side of it.

"Look, boy," said the Venusian captain, "I've taken enough fancy to you to know that I wouldn't like to see you dead. You can't try to jump ship and slip onto Earth Federation without getting a death ray through your hard young head. You're foolish to want to try."

Thorne Creegar shook his head grimly.

"I'm going back," he said flatly. "All hell can't keep me away."

The Venusian captain shrugged. "You should know what you want to do with your hide. It belongs to you, of course. But I'd advise you to stick here aboard my space-going refuge until we hit Venusian territory. You'll

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have a chance there."

Thorne Creegar shook his head again, and in the smoky light of the small cabin, the line of his clean young jaw went hard.

"I've got a score to settle on Earth," he declared stubbornly. "I'm going back there. Your planetary packet is putting in at the Western Hemisphere Second Base in another two days. Just give me a chance to slip over the side at nightfall, that's all I ask."

The Venusian captain said nothing. He reached for the squat round bottle of his planet's celebrated rum and filled both glasses to the brim. He put the bottle down, and picked up his own glass.

He looked curiously over the brim of the glass at Creegar.

"You don't give up very easily," he said.

"You can get up a lot of willpower in five years of a penal hell," Creegar replied. "Here's to the hell I left behind me." He lifted his own glass. "It gave me nothing, if not time to do a lot of thinking."

The Venusian captain clinked his glass against Creegar's.

"You Earthmen," he said, "think too hard, too long, about things. That's the trouble with you all."

Silently, the two drained their glasses. The captain put his back on the duralloy plank with a metallic thump. He wiped a dirty uniform tunic sleeve across his puffy wet lips.

"But then," said the captain, "I suppose that's why you Earthmen dominate the rest of us in the interplanetary system." He rubbed his blue stubbled chin in rueful reflection.

Creegar ran his tongue along his even mouth, looked down at his empty glass. The captain sighed, picked up the bottle and once more refilled both glasses.

"Then you'll do it?" Creegar demanded.

The Venusian captain sighed heavily, his huge paunch moving like a large balloon. He shook his head sadly.

"Yes," he said. "I suppose if I didn't, you'd grab an atomic pistol from one of my crew and try to take over my ship forcibly. Even," he added warningly, "though such a stupid gesture would probably cost you your life."

"You'll do it?" Creegar repeated again.

The captain nodded. "Yes. I suppose if you've got to die, I'd rather have someone else kill you."

"You're the first one I've met with those sentiments in quite some time," Creegar said with dry bitterness.

The captain's fat bulk shook in mirth at this irony. He picked up his glass and tossed it off once more, planking it down even more loudly this time.

"Do you have any plans?" the captain asked. "Or are you just going to be stupid and heroic?"

"A man can make a lot of careful plans in five years," Creegar said.

"Have you allowed for the changes five years can make?" the captain demanded.

"I've allowed for the changes a hundred years can make," Creegar answered. "I started planning this thing four years ago—a year after I'd been in that damned silence. It's surprising to think that it took me a year to figure everything out, all that had been done to me, and by whom. From that moment on, I planned. Planned for nothing but my movements after those damned doors opened for me."

"You have money?" the captain asked.

CREEGAR shrugged. "A little. My stake, what's left of it. It should be enough."

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The captain fumbled beneath the waistcoat of his tunic, and an instant later he was thumping a money belt of astonishingly heavy dimensions on the duralloy plank.

"Here," he said. "I have plenty. Take as much as you like."

Astonishment filled Creegar's eyes. He wet his lips for an instant, looking at the money belt on the table.

"Why," he asked the captain softly, "do you want to do this for me?"

The Venusian shrugged, colored in embarrassment.

"Maybe," he said, "it is because I am getting to be an old fool. Maybe it is because I see in your eyes the same thing that was once in the eyes of a hell raising Venusian space bandit. Maybe it is because someone once gave that young Venusian swashbuckler the chance to fight back when he seemed licked. Maybe he'd like to return the favor, pass it on to another who isn't afraid to fight back when the universe seems lined against him."

Creegar ran a hand across his eyes in a sympathetic gesture.

"Maybe," he said softly, "the universe isn't completely rotten."

The captain opened three compartments of the money belt and dumped out three stacks of Martian *klekas*.

"This is roughly two hundred Earth dollars. It is more easily exchanged than Venusian money. You shouldn't have trouble exchanging it."

"No," Creegar admitted, taking the stacked *klekas*. "No. It should be easy to exchange, once I get safely onto Earth."

The Venusian captain scratched the blue stubble of beard on his fat jowls. He reached for the bottle again.

"*If* you get safely onto Earth," he corrected. "*If* you get by them." He filled his glass to the brim, raised it significantly . . .

AT THE door of Commissioner Judson Bellham's office, Lee Hudge paused briefly, rapped lightly on the door twice, then pushed against the smooth panel and stepped across the threshold into the room where his chief sat behind a massive *platenoid* desk.

Hudge was a small, thin man, nearing middle age with stringy blonde hair growing slightly bald at the peak of his forehead. In his unobtrusive blue tunic, a first impression of the man seemed to indicate that he was mild, unimpressive, harmless.

But there was something about the way he held his head, something that glittered in his pale blue eyes, something in his stance suggesting he was poised on the balls of his feet, that enabled your second glance to recognize a hidden, surging power in that small lithe body; a driving, relentless purpose in those all-knowing eyes.

Lee Hudge was no larger than a small atomic cannon. He was also just as deadly.

"Step right in, Lee," Bellham boomed in his rich basso.

Lee Hudge paused to turn and shut the door behind him. He did this in the manner of a man who leaves no details unattended to. Then he turned back and advanced to within two feet of Bellham's desk.

"You have an assignment, Commissioner?" Lee Hudge asked. His voice was a trifle thin, a little high. There was little inflection in his question. He delivered it more like a statement.

Bellham leaned back in his chair, taking the brochure from the desk before him and flipping idly through its pages.

"You remember the Thorne Creegar Case?" Bellham asked.

Lee Hudge nodded. Save for the flicking of his eyes to the brochure, there was no expression on his face.

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"You always claimed it never should have been closed, if I recall rightly," Bellham said. "I know you always believed I was wrong in pleading for Creegar before the Court of Justice. You maintained for a long time after that that he had the death sentence coming to him, didn't you?"

Hudge nodded again. "I did, and I still say the same thing. Creegar was a swine. They gave him too much of a break." There was no mistaking the sudden fanatic glitter that came into his pale blue eyes.

"I've finally come to agree with you," Bellham said. "And it seems that I've almost been too late in seeing the truth of the matter. Thorne Creegar was released from his penal planet two days ago. He'd only served half his sentence. The Federation Pardons Board gave him a conditional release."

Bellham did not bother to add that the four men he controlled on the Federation Pardons Board had been pressured into their move by no one less than himself. Lee Hudge would never discover that.

Hudge suddenly stepped closer to the desk. He raised his fist and brought it down with a bang on the *platenoid* surface.

"Why in the hell didn't they inform me of their consideration of his case?" Hudge demanded in sudden shrill fury. "I'd never have recommended a sentence severance for that skunk in a million light years!"

Bellham raised his hand. "Calm down, Lee. They went forward with Creegar's release without even notifying me. When I learned about it, it was too late."

"Too late," Hudge snorted. "It was too late when they didn't give him the death sentence."

"But it isn't completely too late," Bellham broke in. "There are several things we can do about Creegar, Lee. Several things that can amend the errors already made in his case."

"And what are they?" Hudge demanded.

BELLHAM shifted his massive frame in his chair. "We can keep him under scrutiny, and reopen his case."

Hudge licked his small, thin, dry lips. He half closed his eyes. Then he opened them again.

"It has been five years," he reminded Bellham. "A case can grow plenty damned cold in five years."

Bellham held up the brochure. "The witnesses are all still alive, and what is more important, I'm certain Creegar will try to get back here. In fact, the information I've already gathered, shows, that he's on his way to Earth right at this moment."

"It's a return to a penal planet for life, or summary execution if he's caught," Hudge declared reflectively. "I don't think he'd dare try it."

"He'll be back for revenge, or I don't know Creegar," Bellham said.

"Revenge?" Lee Hudge raised his eyebrows.

"Against those who testified against him," Bellham said. "But he'll never get that far. I know the tramp Venusian freighter he's aboard. I checked on his movements after leaving the penal planet. I got in touch with the Venusian captain of that space tramp. Under my instructions, he's agreed to help Creegar try to slip through the Guards at Western Hemisphere Second Base when he puts in there two days from now. He'll keep us informed of Creegar's plans and tip us off in time to nab him."

Lee Hudge's pale eyes lighted in appreciation. "Good," he said.

Bellham grinned. "It cost money. The Venusian captain's palm took quite

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a bit of greasing. But he'll sell out on Creegar and deliver him to us on arrival." Bellham paused. "You'll nab him," he added . . .

CHAPTER IV

The Web Tightens

SHERRY BENNET looked listlessly at the silver tunic gowns spread before her. Her raven hair framed a face that was fixed in an expression of white resignation. Her hazel eyes were lusterless, apathetic.

"I don't know," Sherry said half aloud. "The gown on the right, I suppose. It doesn't matter, really." She caught herself suddenly, flushed momentarily, and amended. "They are all lovely, and I imagine that one will be best."

The lean, angular young woman who stood beside the gowns looked curiously at Sherry, but only said,

"I agree with you. That is the loveliest. I shall have it set aside. You will make a lovely bride in such a gown."

"Thank you," Sherry said automatically.

The large, gray haired woman standing beside Sherry broke in.

"You may take them away, please," she instructed.

The angular young woman began packing the gowns. After a few moments she picked up the boxes into which she had put them and left the room. The large, gray haired woman beside Sherry put her hand sympathetically on the girl's shoulder.

"Do you think you should go through with it, Sherry?" she asked.

"I must, Nana," Sherry said lifelessly. "I must, for Thorne's sake."

"Thorne has been freed," the woman called Nana declared.

"But only because of Judson."

"Bellham," Nana spat. "I detest that man, Sherry. He's a beast!"

Sherry shook her head. "He loves me, Nana. And though I could never love him, I must repay him for all he has done for Thorne, and for me."

"He's forced you into this," Nana declared with bitter resentment.

"You don't really understand Judson, Nana," Sherry said. "It is his way to be blunt, even crude, at times. He was thinking of me, and knowing the life that would be mine until I died if I were to go along as I have been."

"You'll never forget Thorne. You'll never change your feeling for him at all," Nana said. "You can't run away from that, anymore than you can run away from yourself."

"Thorne is lost to me," Sherry said dully. "I'll never see him again."

The large, gray haired Nana stood before Sherry, her big red hands on her plump hips. Her eyes flashed.

"You're lying to me, Sherry," she snapped. "You're even trying to lie to yourself. Your fear has driven you into this bargain. You are afraid of Judson Bellham, afraid of what he might do to Thorne if you didn't comply with his wishes!"

Sherry's face went whiter. Her lips trembled.

"It's the truth, Sherry. Every word of it. You're doing this in desperation. You're doing it because you're helpless, because there seems to be no other solution."

Sherry's voice was low, shaken. "I, I am doing what is right, Nana."

"Are you doing what Thorne would wish?"

Sherry's hazel eyes filled with tears. Her white, even teeth bit into her soft underlip.

"Do you think Thorne would want his freedom, would want his life, if he

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knew the price you were going to pay for it?"

Sherry rose, impulsively, burying her lovely face in Nana's ample breast. Her slim young body became convulsed by sobs.

"Oh, Nana, Nana," she cried. "Nana, I *must* do as I've planned. I must!"

The large gray haired Nana put her big arms comfortingly around the girl's shoulders. In her deep brown eyes there was a fierce, hard hatred.

"We can pray, Sherry," she said

"There are still eight days, Sherry," she said softly. "Eight days. And Thorne is free for those days. We can pray, child. We can pray!"

The girl's sobs continued unabated, as though they'd gathered beyond the endurance of the courageous dam she'd built against them . . .

THORNE CREEGAR paced restlessly back and forth on the enclosed dirty deck of the Venusian tramp space freighter. For the past forty-eight hours he had slept little, eaten only enough to keep the fires of strength and determination burning in his lean young body. He had been counting off the seconds, the minutes, the hours until his arrival within the Approach Zone of Western Hemisphere Second Base.

Beneath his feet, the vibrations coming through the duralloy plating of the deck, told him that the rocket speed of the vessel had been cut three-quarter propulsion. The first sign of arrival in the Approach Zone of W. H. Base 2.

Inside of another thirty minutes, Thorne knew, the vessel would be slipping securely into mooring at the first Inspection Landing Platform. And in half that time, Thorne Creegar should be ready and waiting to effect a getaway through the crowded space harbor.

His plans, made long ago and carefully, he had passed on to the fat, blue jowled Venusian space skipper. And with but several minor alterations suggested by the captain, Thorne was now waiting grimly, eagerly, to carry them through.

His gear, what little of it was absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of his plans, lay waiting for him at the stern of the vessel. It was over the stern that he was to accomplish his getaway.

Now, pacing the dimly lighted stretch of deck that was beside the ladders to the rocket tube rooms, Thorne steeled himself against the action that would be soon in coming. He did this by thinking back. Such reflection gave him purpose, and a grim determination.

In particular, Thorne remembered his first sight of that small, steel walled room that was to beckon him toward the fringes of insanity for five awful years.

A room large enough to contain a cot and a small, rusted imitation *duralloy* bucket. A room with a thick, sound proof door. A door that opened once every twenty-four hours.

The opening of that cell door had been the only measure Thorne had of time. It was his only method of gauging eternity. And from the first day he had been wise enough to begin his record of the times it opened.

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There had been a narrow hallway outside that door. Thorne was permitted to pace the confines of that hallway with every daily opening of the cell door. Pace the hallway for a period of time that was somewhere between fifteen minutes and half an hour.

Food capsules—a day's rations, were left for him after his return from those limited daily exercises. His return to the screaming silence of that solitary cell.

The first few months had been the worst.

The pain, and the tears; the bitter, burning, horrible anguish had been at its most desperate pitch during those first months. It was then that his sanity teetered. A weaker will, a less steeled mind, might easily have cracked under the strain of those initial days.

Somehow, Thorne had realized this. Realized this even through the torrents of rage that swept him, the all engulfing waves of anguish that smashed relentlessly against the bulwarks of his reason. And in this realization Thorne had fought desperately. Finally, he had won.

The silence was not as loud after that.

The bitterness was turned to channels of determined revenge. Hour on hour, Thorne had turned the pages of the past before him, examining them with a grimly searching keenness that brought much to light. And finally he had learned fully of the treachery, the cunning perfidy that had brought him there.

He had finally seen, with bitter clarity, the cunning web of circumstances that had been woven around him until there was at last no escape from the inevitable results of his so-called "crime." He saw himself, unwitting dupe, carrying on investigations concerning a mysterious smuggling ring—operations at which he was secretly placed by Bellham. He saw, too, the additional clever webs that were woven to lead him to believe that Sloan, the other consular officer assigned with him on the case, was behind the nefarious ring of contraband smuggling.

And Thorne Creegar had slain his fellow officer, killed him in a brief gunduel that was the result of the hideous mistaken complications that had been engineered by Judson Bellham. Too late did Creegar realize that Bellham had forced Sloan into a similar suspicion, and that Bellham's cunningly nurtured suspicions had driven Sloan to the gun play he thought necessary on Creegar.

It was a masterful frame-up.

Even through the trial, Thorne had been bewilderedly unaware of what had been done to him. It was later, in the solitude of his disgrace and banishment, that Thorne had taken the case apart, piece by piece, to reassemble the parts that pointed to but one conclusion. His rage had hardened into bitter, unswerving determination after that.

And from that moment forward he had planned.

With no voice save his own, with no thoughts save those that came to him for the very solitude of his confinement, Thorne Creegar had sustained himself and his sanity on the wells of his contemplated revenge.

HE HAD thought himself halfway through his ordeal, once he had marked the day before the end of the fifth year on the scarred surface of his hard, *duralloy* cotside. And then, to his astonishment, a guard had come to him.

There had been the quarters of the warden, then, and the sound of the first voices beside his own that he had heard in half a decade. The warden had

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made a few remarks. Thorne hadn't caught their meaning. He was listening too intently to the very sounds of the syllables that came from that person's lips.

And then the meaning of those words had struck home to him. They'd left him dazed, uncomprehending. But the words had been fulfilled that following day. The doors had opened, and he'd felt the cold wind on his cheeks. He'd found himself free.

"Lad!" the word broke sharply in on Thorne's recollections.

He wheeled, to see the bulky figure of the Venusian captain coming along the dimly lighted stretch of deck toward him.

Creegar took a deep breath.

"We are almost ready?" he asked.

"Take your position in the stern," the Venusian captain ordered. He extended a pudgy paw.

Creegar took the Venusian's hand. A gesture he had almost forgotten.

"Good luck," the fat space skipper said.

"Thanks," Creegar replied, "for everything."

The Venusian captain took his hand away and grinned. "Don't mention it," he said with sly irony, "to anyone."

Creegar turned away then, starting toward the stern of the space packet. The Venusian captain stood there, his thick arms behind his fat body, a curious expression on his face.

The captain turned away then, and went back in the direction from which he had come. Halfway down the deck, he turned in through an open door over which was marked, *"Communications Room."*

There was a long table inside the narrow room. On it was a maze of complicated apparatus of wires and screens and buttons. The communications officer was absent from the chair placed in the center of this table.

The Venusian captain slid his fat bulk into this empty chair and bent forward toward the large *vizascreen* on the table before him. He made several slow adjustments of the switches and apparatus on the panel below the screen.

A reddish haze transfused the screen for a moment, then it turned a light blue.

Half a second later a face appeared on the screen. A lined, bespectacled, middle-aged face. The owner of the face was wearing a brown uniform cap.

"Hello," the Venusian captain said, "hello, W.H. Base 2."

"Communications operator, coming from control room of Western Hemisphere Space Base Two," said the face on the screen.

"Captain Treowlan, Venusian space freighter, *Verieshu,* coming in," answered the blue jowled captain.

"Harbor facilities open, captain," said the face on the *vizascreen* wearily. "Proceed on schedule."

"An Earth Consular Officer is waiting in your control room for a message from me," the Venusian captain said. "Would you put him on?"

The face disappeared from the screen. Moments passed. Then another face appeared. Its owner was wearing a civilian tunic. He was a small, thin, almost ineffectual looking man with stringy blonde hair that was growing slightly bald at the peaks of his temples.

"Consular Lee Hudge, Law Commission, acting for Commissioner Bellham," said this new face.

"You are prepared to make your arrest?" the Venusian captain asked.

"As scheduled," Lee Hudge's image answered from the screen.

"You have other officers with you?" the Venusian captain answered.

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"I'm taking him in myself," said the image of Lee Hudge on the *vizascreen.*

"I'd advise you to meet my vessel at once in a harbor patrol ship," the Venusian captain said. "I'll have your prisoner ready to turn over to you."

The image on the screen licked his thin lips in satisfaction.

"Fine, I'll engage a vessel immediately. Expect me inside of another ten minutes. You say you'll have the prisoner ready to turn over?"

"Yes," the Venusian captain declared, "as promised." He reached forward, then, and made switch-off adjustments on the panel below the *vizascreen.*

The light blue color of the screen faded into a reddish tinge once more, and finally back to a dull silver.

The Venusian captain lurched his heavy bulk out of the chair and stepped back out onto the dimly lighted deck. His glance traveled sternward. Thorne Creegar was waiting down there in the darkness. Just as the captain had instructed him to.

The captain smiled. He patted the side of his tunic jacket. Concealed on a holster inside was an atomic pistol.

"Necessary item," the captain said half aloud, "if I'm going to take care of a prisoner. Especially such a dangerous prisoner."

Smiling to himself, the Venusian captain turned and waddled toward the stern of his vessel. There was a matter to be attended to if he were to carry out his part of the agreement.

A matter in which the atomic pistol would come in more than handily . . .

CHAPTER V

The Trap Is Sprung

LEE HUDGE stood beside the pilot of the harbor patrol rocket craft as it picked its way through the darkness and space craft tonnage that lay cloaked and moored everywhere around the tiny vessel.

His pale blue eyes were half shaded by almost hairless lids as he savored inwardly this moment of exquisite anticipation that would lead to an even more exquisite moment of triumph and revenge.

The pilot, still looking intently forward through the fore screen of the vessel, said from the corner of his mouth:

"I think that's the Venusian tub dead ahead, sir."

"Good," Hudge said in his thin voice.

"They see us, sir," said the pilot. "They're making preparations to take you aboard, dropping a gangway tube over the side."

"Then I'd better get ready," Hudge decided aloud.

"Through that forward compartment, sir," the pilot said. "It'll lead you to the top deck from which you can board her."

Hudge nodded and stepped toward the forward compartment. Instants later he stood on the enclosed surface of the top deck. It was easier to see the Venusian freighter looming up on their comparatively tiny craft from here.

A few more minutes passed, in which the pilot of the harbor patrol rocket craft maneuvered his vessel expertly in toward the side of the bulky Venusian space tramp, and Hudge waited impatiently beside the air lock door that would be brought beside the gangway boarding tube that hung from the side of the other ship.

In those fleeting moments it seemed to Hudge as if he would never be aboard the other craft. And then at last he was opening the airlock door before him and ascending the ladder in the

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gangway tube that hung from the side of the Venusian vessel.

And at length he faced a smiling, fat, blue jowled Venusian in a drab and dirty captain's tunic.

"I'm Hudge," he said. "Consular officer. You have the prisoner ready?"

The Venusian captain still smiled as he said, "Of course. Quite as promised. Follow me, please."

The Venusian captain turned away, and Hudge stepped swiftly after him. They marched along a poorly lighted deckway, and suddenly the captain turned to say: "Right here, officer. In my cabin. It was the safest place to hold him while waiting for you."

The captain stepped aside, gesturing with his hand at the door he'd pushed slightly open.

Hudge ran his tongue along his dry lips. One instant more and he would face Cregar. It was almost too magnificent to bear. He stepped ahead of the captain and into the narrow little stateroom.

He heard the captain follow him in.

And then Hudge was peering bewilderedly around the bare, unoccupied little room.

Hudge wheeled instantly. His mouth open. "He's gone—" Hudge started to exclaim.

AND then his eyes looked down into the barrel of an atomic pistol. An atomic pistol held unwaveringly in a pudgy hand. The hand of the Venusian captain.

"Relax, consular officer," the captain said smilingly.

"What is this?" Hudge demanded wrathfully.

The Venusian captain raised his eyebrows. "It should be apparent to a consular officer," he said in mock surprise.

Hudge's thin mouth worked. His jaw went hard.

"You were paid to turn over a man to me," he grated. "Put down that weapon and take me to him."

The Venusian captain smiled again.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," he mocked.

The muted throb of a small rocket ship came to Hudge's ears at that instant. He cocked his head.

"Your intended prisoner has just departed," the Venusian captain explained.

"You won't get away with this," Hudge flamed.

The Venusian shrugged amiably. "Perhaps I shall. I have been able to get away with a great deal since I was born, especially when it came to tricking stupid Earth officers."

Hudge started forward.

The Venusian captain raised the barrel of the atomic pistol. His twinkling eyes went suddenly hard.

"Don't be foolish, consular officer," he advised.

Hudge looked into the barrel of a pistol

"I'm telling you," Hudge grated, "you'll be sorry."

"There is no statute in Interplanetary Law, even though it was conceived principally by Earth legislators, that permits you to board a Venusian vessel

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unless she is actually moored in an Earth space port. My vessel is not so moored," the captain said softly.

"Money was put into your hands," Hudge began, "to turn—"

"The money was most deeply appreciated. I still have it. I intend to keep it," the Venusian was smiling again. "It is the only good I ever received in a transaction with Earth officers. I shall look back on the transaction fondly in my old age."

Hudge said something obscene. His face was livid with rage and humiliation.

"Of course you didn't come aboard equipped with a Warrant of Search. Interplanetary Laws make that formality necessary. I felt sure you'd take too much for granted, and come without such a warrant. Thus you are an intruder. I can hold you here indefinitely, until it pleases me to turn you over to the patrol in which you arrived," the captain said.

Hudge's eyes fixed inexorably on the Venusian's, as though marking the captain indelibly in his memory book of revenge.

"By the time you are released," the captain continued matter-of-factly, "your intended prisoner will be through the harbor guard and safely on Earth."

"For that, for aiding an ex-convict to return from his exile, you'll get a sentence that'll tear your soul loose," Hudge raged.

The captain smiled again. "Oh, didn't I tell you? I tried to stop him. I did my utmost. My efforts were unsuccessful. My crew, to the last man, watched me trying to prevent his escape from our vessel. Naturally, they'll all swear to that."

Hudge's hands clenched and unclenched at his side. Then suddenly he seemed relaxed and his lips moved. He spoke almost inaudibly, as if to himself.

"Okay, Creegar," Hudge said softly. "Okay, you win this round. But there's more to come. Plenty more to come. And your neck is out now farther than I'd ever hoped to see!"

The Venusian captain smiled. "I don't think he can hear you," he declared with polite sarcasm.

Hudge's eyes focused calmly on the captain. But though suddenly his lips smiled, those pale blue eyes brimmed with hate . . .

THERE was only one other person on the small liferocket craft with Thorne Creegar, and that other person was a short, bandy-legged Venusian spaceman from the freighter they'd left minutes before.

The bandy-legged little spaceman was at the controls of the craft, and his blunt jaw worked soundlessly on a cud of Junovian tobacco as he stared out through the *vizapanel* above the nose of their ship into the inky blackness of the surrounding harbor.

Thorne was wearing a fresh tunic, given him by the Venusian captain before he'd slipped into the waiting craft at the stern. At his hip was strapped an atomic pistol, another present from the fat and smiling space skipper. His personal gear was now reduced to but brief essentials, compact enough to be carried in the small kitsack he wore slung over his left shoulder.

In that kitsack was the money which also had been given him by his Venusian spacefaring benefactor.

Ahead of him lay Earth. A scant five minutes ahead through that blackness.

Thorne turned to the bandy-legged spaceman at the controls.

"What point do we put in at?" he asked.

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The spaceman continued expertly to guide the little craft passing the looming hulks of the larger vessels crowding the harbor. He considered the question in apparent reflection, spat a stream of junovian tobacco juice on the *duralloy* planking of the deck.

"Hah," he said, "an old unused wharf landing post."

"You know the spot well?" Thorne asked.

"Should know well," the bandy-legged spaceman answered tersely. "Been smuggling into that space dock plenty long time."

Thorne's eyebrows lifted. Smuggling—so that was the Venusian freighter's occupation!

He grinned in humorless amusement. It was odd that the first person to give him a break in over five years should be not only a Venusian, but a smuggling leader as well.

He'd been lucky, nothing more in finding such a vessel as the Venusian craft on his departure from the penal planet. And it was still luck, and nothing more than that, that had made the Venusian captain the sort who held a strong enough contempt for the forces of Federation Law to help him run the exile blockade.

Creegar grinned again, bitterly.

Minutes passed, and suddenly the gnarled little spaceman at the controls of the craft cut the power of the single rocket tube completely.

"Are we—" Thorne began.

The bandy-legged little pilot held up his hand for silence.

"Easy," he hissed. "We're coming up to the wharf!"

Creegar's heart began to hammer excitedly against his chest. The palms of his hands became wet, and he found himself digging his nails into them.

Expertly, the bandy-legged spaceman continued to bring the little craft into mooring on the rusty and deserted wharf. Thorne saw the little man's gnarled hand reach swiftly for the degravitator brake. Then they settled slowly to the surface of the wharfside.

The bandy-legged little pilot pointed toward the bulkhead door to his right.

"That way," he hissed. "Quick. And good luck!"

Thorne stepped to the bulkhead door. He waved a hand at the pilot. He found the door release. It answered to his pressure. He stepped out, and dropped nimbly three feet to the rotted planking of the wharf.

AND even as Creegar's feet hit the planking, the single tube of the tiny rocket lifecraft *pluffed* into life again, and the small craft shot up and away.

Thorne looked left, then right, swiftly, eyes knifing the darkness. Then, unhesitatingly, he turned to the right and raced quickly across the uncertain planking to the concealing shelter of a warehouse.

The warehouse, like the wharf, was deserted, long unused. Thorne's fingers, exploring the surface of its side, led him eventually to a small, broken door.

Creegar stepped inside the warehouse. He needed time to get his bearings, to catch his breath. His heart was pounding furiously from excitement, and he had taken his atomic pistol from its holster on his hip.

This was Earth, he realized. *Earth—after five long years!* And other thoughts came to him. *Capture here meant return to the penal planet or execution. For though he was a part of this Earth, a creature born to it, he was unwanted, stalked, an outlaw in the midst of those who had once been his own!*

The burning bitterness returned to

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Thorne Creegar. Returned to stamp out the spark that had flamed but momentarily within his earthbound soul. Again, he recalled his purpose here, and again his clean young jaw went grim in the realization of the task that lay ahead of him.

For a few moments longer Creegar stood there, fighting back the tenseness that came instinctively to his hard young body. And at length, when his muscles had returned to a degree of calm coördination, he stepped back through the warehouse door and out once again to the open wharfside. As he moved, he returned his atomic pistol to its holster. Calmness, an unhurried alertness, now, were necessary.

Fortunately, the arrival and departure of the single rocket lifecraft which had delivered Creegar to the wharf had apparently gone unnoticed by the patrols that would undoubtedly be covering the harbor in routine inspection.

An as Thorne began to stride unhurriedly along the deserted space dock, he rechecked mentally the directions the Venusian captain had given him to go by on his arrival here.

Creegar had a general concept of the surroundings into which he had been thrown. But that concept had been formed by infrequent visits to this space base well over half a decade ago. Details changed in five years, even though general outlines endured.

And if anything would trap Thorne, it would be some minute detail that had been altered over those five years.

Then Venusian captain, however, seemed to have schooled Creegar expertly in the changes that had occurred here. Obviously his knowledge had been more than casual, inasmuch as Thorne had but a few minutes before learned that the fat Venusian skipper was a smuggler.

Creegar continued along, following the mental map he had compiled from the captain's data. Minutes passed, many of them, and he had still not encountered signs of human presence.

It would be necessary to leave the space base behind him as quickly as possible. The likelihood of his falling under suspicious eyes was greatest there. Once free of this danger zone, the going would be comparably easier. His new tunic garb, plus a casual front, would attract no more attention than any other casual traveler might.

There was a road some ten miles away from the space port, and three hours later Thorne, traveling through thick Cultivation Fields,* stepped out upon its metallically glittering surface.

Even in the darkness it was apparent that the roadway in either direction and as far as Thorne could see, was deserted. Nevertheless, Thorne kept close to the side of the Cultivation Fields fringing the roadway, unwilling to risk the chance passage of *rockabouts*** or commercial vehicles.

* *Cultivation Fields.* At the turn of the twenty-third century, the Federation Governments were finally able to bring into actuality an agricultural planning system which sectioned off the best crop soils in every locality of Earth, using each exclusively for the product judged scientifically most suited to its soil. This, in many instances, forced a reshuffling of residential areas which were found to be built on ground of agricultural value, and resulted in large developments springing up at the very doors of some of the greatest cities. At the time this remapping scheme was put into effect, Earth, and numerous other heavily peopled planets, faced food shortages unless a scientific readjustment of agricultural lands were brought about. Over a period of twenty-five years, however, the readjustments were successfully made, resulting in estimated guarantees of plentiful food supplies through the next four centuries.

** *Rockabouts:* Streamlined passenger cars adapted to the tremendously high speed traffic of the twenty-third century super-highway systems webbing Earth and the larger more populated planets. Name derived from the fact that they operate on condensed rocket power. Generally similar, with the exception of extreme utility design, in appearance to the streamlined racing cars driven today by Malcom Campbell and other record breaking pioneers in the automotive field.

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FORTUNATELY, too, these Cultivation Fields were given over to wheat, affording Thorne quick shelter, if needed, in their tall concealment. Ahead of him, a distance of some four hours by foot, lay the local Transcontinental Tube System Depot.†

There, according to the plan he had worked out, Thorne would be able to board a *tubetrain* for New York, his first preconceived destination.

For in New York, nerve center of Earth Federation, lay the central offices of the Federation Law Commission.

And Judson Bellham presided there.

Thorne trudged onward, while again and again he went over the plans in his mind.

An hour might have passed, conceivably more, before the first vehicle roared down the metallic stretch of roadway toward Thorne. He heard the sound of its approach even before he could see it in the distance. Immediately, he sought the shelter of the wheat fields on the side of the road.

There he crouched, holding his breath unconsciously, watching the dot on the highway grow larger as it sped in his direction. The vehicle, whatever sort it was, came from the direction of the space port. This in itself was enough to make Thorne decide to keep in hiding.

It roared on toward him until at last he was able to tell from its outline that it was a passenger vehicle, a *rockabout*, long, low, streamlined and powerful.

Something in that swiftly approaching outline caught a cog in Thorne Creegar's memory. But it wasn't until the vehicle blasted past his place of concealment that he realized what that tugging at his recollection signified.

The *rockabout* was of the extremely rakish design and red coloring of the staff cars belonging to the Law Commission Consular Force.

Tight-lipped, Creegar watched the vehicle blur into a grayish black dot in the distance. And only until it had vanished from sight did he emerge once more from his hiding place and resume his arduous walk.

Someone from the consular force had been at the space port. Someone, quite possibly, anticipating his daring entry. But if they had checked his movements, if they had expected him to try to gain entry here, why hadn't they been able to stop him?

Surely, Creegar reasoned, there were no more than four or five space ships putting in during the past five hours at the space port. It would conceivably have been easy enough to watch those ships with more than usual caution.

He shook his head, perplexed. If his attempt had been expected so soon—and he had counted on its being unexpected—someone botched the job of watching for him. He shook his head again, dismissing the thought. It couldn't have had any connection with his entry. Undoubtedly that car had been at the space port on business other than the task of preventing his entry.

Creegar continued to march doggedly onward. The distance to the tube depot was now less than three hours away. He had his plan made for getting aboard a *tubetrain*. A simple plan, and a daring one . . .

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†*Transcontinental Tube System*: Established at the turn of the twenty-second century, the Transcontinental Tube System, an underground railway running cable trains powered by rocket motors, replaced the antiquated railroads of the day. Completely circling Earth, this system hauled billions of tons of freight and passengers monthly, cutting the travel time and expense of such operations down to a quarter of the previous records established by railroads.

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CHAPTER VI

The Black Network

SOME six hours later, a flushed and angry Lee Hudge stood in the central offices of the Federation Law Commission, grimly weathering the storm of abuse an invective heaped upon his unflinching brow by an irate Judson Bellham.

"Slipped right through your famous fingers, eh, Hudge?" Bellham stormed, striding back and forth before his ornate desk. His deep voice was heavy with sarcasm.

"You were the one who arranged for the pick-up," Hudge defended himself. His thin, high, voice was knife sharp. "You were the one who settled the affair with the Venusian captain. Had your plans gone as you'd intended them to, as I had a right to expect them to, I wouldn't have needed any additional precautions in picking him up!"

Judson Bellham colored more deeply. "He's loose, now, Hudge. Loose with hell in his heart. Undoubtedly he's heading this way. His only purpose in returning, in risking his neck, is revenge. Did you ever stop to think who'll be the first person his revenge will seek out? It'll be you, Hudge, no one but you."

Lee Hudge ran a thin hand through his stringy blonde hair. His pale blue eyes showed no acceptance of fear. His thin lips were tight in a line of scornful acceptance of a challenge.

"A lot of murdering swine would like to even the score with me," he said flatly. "It's never bothered me before, and it doesn't bother me now. I'll get Creegar, and he won't have to come to me. I'm going after him!"

Bellham seemed to be regaining his composure. His voice was more normal as he said: "I'm counting on you to get him, Lee. You did it before, and you're the one man who can do it this time."

Into Hudge's pale blue eyes there came a gleam of shining fanaticism.

"I didn't catch up with him," Hudge answered harshly. "Law caught up with him. Law and justice. Justice won't be tricked, ever. It will catch up with Creegar this time just as certainly as it did the last. He's one man on a planet of millions. One man outlawed by the decent members of the society of those millions. He's one man against the entire forces of the Federation Law Commission. He hasn't a chance!"

Judson Bellham moved his massive frame to a chair behind his desk and deposited himself lightly in it. He reached out and snapped the switch below the *telaboard* on his desk.

"Send me in anything that's been picked up on the Creegar reëntry case in the last hour," Bellham barked into the *vizascreen*. He flicked off the switch and leaned back.

"How many men did you post to watch the entries to New York?" he asked.

"A dozen," Lee Hudge answered. "One at each of the ten terminals and two men to check back along the route from the space port."

Bellham frowned. "You should have posted more."

"They're my best men," Hudge snapped. "If he can get by them, he can evade the entire Federation Law Commission."

Bellham found expensive Venusian cigars in a container by his elbow, selected one for himself and without proffering any to Hudge, clamped the lid back on the humidor and lighted it with an *electralite*. He filled the air with blue circles, half closing his eyes.

"I'm going to have to rely heavily on you in this Creegar case, Lee," Bell-

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ham said. "My first hunch, on his release, proved damnably correct. I knew he'd try to get back."

Lee Hudge nodded noncommittally.

"I'll be unusually tied up during the next several weeks," Bellham went on. "My forthcoming marriage will keep me away from an active prosecution of this thing myself. I'll have to leave the case entirely in your hands."

Hudge looked narrowly at Bellham. "Have you considered the fact that your, ah, marriage might be jeopardized by Creegar's return? Sherry Bennet was the girl Creegar was ready to marry."

Bellham's face was expressionless as he answered. "I have considered that angle, Hudge. It provides another reason why the apprehension of Creegar as swiftly as possible becomes increasingly important. I wouldn't want his twisted mind to seek vengeance on Sherry."

"How do you think he'll look on you?" Hudge said with thin sarcasm. "His vengeance would hit at you before Sherry."

Bellham shrugged with elaborate casualness. "Perhaps," he said. "At any rate, he'll be caught before another twenty-four hours have gone by."

A secretary entered, left a sheaf of papers on Bellham's desk, and departed. Bellham picked up the sheaf. His eyes flicked along the first pages, then he flipped quickly through the remaining pages. He held out the sheaf smilingly to Lee Hudge.

"Nice work, Lee," he said. "Your operatives are already within an inch of bringing Creegar in. His trail has been picked up. They're tracking him down now, getting closer any minute. He hasn't a chance to elude them."

His small face expressionless, Lee Hudge took the proffered report. He scanned it briefly, handed it back to Bellham.

"Good," he said matter-of-factly . . .

ON the *tubetrain* for New York, Thorne Creegar sat quietly in the small compartment near the rear of the front section, eyes staring unseeingly out the window at the blurred darkness of the gigantic transportation tube through which he sped.

Creegar was remembering the faint suspicion in the eyes of the ticket agent at the depot where he'd paid his fare. The clever imitation of a slightly sotted space tar going into New York for a weekend before returning to duty in the space lanes had been well enough received. The ticket agent had smilingly made out Creegar's pass, while Thorne weaved in feigned drunkenness and fumbled for the purchase price.

The drunkenness had been Creegar's ruse to distract attention from his physical and facial characteristics. And it had succeeded, keeping the agent's attention on his besotted gyrations rather than his appearance. But Creegar had made one mistake in fumbling for his fare. In his too expert weaving, he fumbled at the wrong section of his money belt, revealing for the briefest fraction of an instant the hoarded *klekas* the Venusian captain had given him. Too much money for a common space tar to be carrying. The suspicion had flickered momentarily in the agent's eyes then, and Thorne, becoming instantly aware of it, had taken his ticket and moved away as swiftly as possible.

Mentally, he had prayed that the agent would refrain from any carrying out of his suspicions until the *tubetrain* came through. And fortunately, he hadn't, for Creegar was able to board the conveyance unmolested.

But now, counting the minutes as he stared unseeingly out into the blackness, Creegar was aware that, if his en-

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try had been discovered, his movements had already been checked from the space port to the *tubetrain* depot and thence to this train.

And by now Creegar had reason to believe that his entry had been discovered, and that even now his whereabouts was known to the forces of the Law Commission.

For the green tuniced conductor of this particular section of the *tubetrain* had already passed back and forth before Creegar's compartment eight times. And on each occasion, Creegar had felt his secretive glance. It would be natural for his pursuers to notify the conductors of this *tubetrain* to be on the alert for the man they wanted. His description, flashed to them, would easily enable them to single him out and to keep him under watch.

At New York, the next depot stop, consular officers would be waiting to take Creegar from the train. And as soon as they came within twenty minutes of New York, Creegar knew, his compartment would be automatically locked, keeping him prisoner.

But Creegar had planned against this. Planned against each step with a counter step. And it was his knowledge that the conductor would fear rousing his suspicions until approximately that time, that gave Creegar what little sense of security he now felt. For the *tubetrain* was still better than an hour out of New York. And as far as they knew, Creegar was still unaware of the fact that he was followed.

Creegar's hard young mouth gave a grim imitation of a smile. They'd get him eventually, perhaps, but not before he'd accomplished what he'd set out to do. And his plans for that accomplishment were well and carefully constructed. So carefully constructed that even his own mental gauging of the time transpiring in this journey was important.

In five years of solitude, a man can learn to gauge time with astonishing facility. Thorne Creegar had so trained himself.

AND now at last satisfied with his mental time calculations, Creegar rose and began methodically to strap his essential gear together. From the small kitsack he took an atomic pistol, presented to him by the Venusian captain. This he placed beneath his tunic coat. Then, securing the rest of his gear tightly to his shoulder, Creegar stepped out of the compartment and into the narrow aisle of the *tubetrain*.

As he had expected the aisle was not deserted. The conductor stood at the far end. And as he caught sight of Creegar, his jaw fell slack, his face whitened, and he stepped back as if to wheel and make for the next section.

Thorne Creegar's voice, low, calm, cold, arrested him.

"Stay right as you are," Creegar demanded. His hand darted swiftly beneath his tunic coat and brought forth the atomic pistol. He waved it at the white faced conductor ominously, and started down the aisle toward him.

Frightenedly, the conductor watched Creegar advance. Slowly, and without command, he raised his arms above his head, eager to show he was unarmed.

Creegar surveyed him coldly from a distance of several yards.

"Step forward," Creegar commanded, "slowly."

The green tuniced conductor advanced shakily. He was two steps from Creegar when he lunged wildly toward the gun trained on him. It was a frantic, a desperate effort. The effort of a man who considered himself already doomed by one who'd been described

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to him as a wild killer.

His expression still unchanged, Creegar met the lunge by stepping back and bringing the barrel of his atomic pistol down hard on the base of the conductor's skull.

Mouth open in choked pain; the conductor fell face forward and unconscious to the floor of the aisle. Creegar stood looking down at him for a moment, then he stepped forward and bent over the unconscious form.

Creegar looked down at the conductor

When he rose a moment later, Creegar still held the atomic pistol in his right hand. But in his left he now held a set of percussion valve brake keys. Emergency keys, designed to halt the *tubetrain* in case of accident or breakdown in any of the mechanism.

Creegar placed these keys in his tunic pocket, then bent over again, grabbing the conductor by the collar of his green uniform and dragging him back down the aisle to the compartment he himself had occupied moments before.

Placing the conductor in his compartment, Creegar found straps to bind and gag the fellow. He left him there two minutes later and went again into the aisle. This time Creegar's movements were sure and well timed. At the end of the section he found the percussion valve brake compartment. There he quickly went to work with the keys he'd taken from the conductor.

Slowly, carefully, Creegar cut off the *tubetrain's* rocket power, meanwhile twisting the brake keys in coordination. Imperceptibly the *tubetrain* slowed shudderingly to a stop.

Creegar had counted on the time it would take for the conductors of the other sections and the *tubetrain's* rocket engineers to signal the apparent breakdown to each other. And he used this time to race to the rear of the first compartment where he found the emergency exit. He smashed the *glassicade* apparatus that set the door's automatic mechanism into action, and stood back while it opened slowly.

Then Creegar was leaping down to the floor of the transportation tunnel, hard rocky terrain that was covered with slippery moisture.

THE tunnel was completely dark save for the scant illumination that streamed from the now stalled *tubetrain*. And Creegar utilized this darkness to the fullest, moving far to the other side of the tunnel until his hands touched the cold wall.

Now Creegar started back in the opposite direction from that in which the *tubetrain* had been traveling. If his calculations had been correct, an emergency exit from the tunnel itself would lie less than a mile off.

Creegar ran, slipping and stumbling on the surface beneath his feet. Not once did he look back, for every second was now important. The delay caused by a wasted minute might mean his life.

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For should a *tubetrain* rocket through the tunnel in the other direction, he would be directly in the path of it. The suction and concussion blasts of the rocket tubes could kill him instantly.

Sweat stood out in beads on Creegar's forehead, and his lungs were choked in the heavy dampness of the darkened tube tunnel. But five minutes later, gaspingly, he arrived at the emergency tunnel exit. And even as his hands tore for the lever of the heavy *duralloy* door that would lead him above-ground, Creegar heard the distant *thrumming* of a tubetrain approaching from the opposite direction.

Creegar threw his weight against the lever, and the door opened. Clean air swept down into his face, and he pulled himself up onto the steps, blinking in the faint pinpoints of light that danced down into his eyes from the screened aperture above him.

Minutes later Creegar stepped out of the tunnel exit and onto a moonlit stretch of roadway. His face was grim in satisfaction. They might wait for him at the New York terminal, but it would do them little good now.

For this much of his scheme was now completed. And his pursuers, certain that he was aboard the *tubetrain,* would have relaxed their vigilance on the ordinary highways leading into New York. Relaxed long enough to give Creegar time to gain entry.

Creegar looked right and left along the highway now, and then, as if deciding on the safer course, he turned his back on the road and set out resolutely through the fields. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Hudge Closes In

SHERRY BENNET moved nervously back and forth before the window of her dressing room, her face whitely composed, her eyes alone revealing the anxiety she felt.

Nana appeared at the doorway, her plump red cheeks shining, her old eyes troubled.

"It is late, Sherry," Nana said reindingly.

"I know, I know it is, Nana. But, I," Sherry paused putting her hand to her forehead, "feel as if something dreadful is going on. I feel as if someone—"

"Thorne?" Nana broke in understandingly.

Sherry Bennet nodded. "Nana, I feel as if Thorne is near, and as if he is in grave danger. I, I can't account for it, but something seems to tell me, to shout warning to me—"

"I understand, child," Nana said, crossing the room to her side. "But he's safe, Sherry. Safer now than he ever was those past five years."

Sherry sighed tremulously, and sat down weakly. "But he's alone, Nana, so awfully alone! If only I could have gone to him— If I could only have met him when he was released—"

Nana placed her hand on Sherry's shoulder in silent understanding.

"It's late, child," she said a moment later. "You should be dressed by now. That, that," Nana seemed to choke on the name, "Bellham will be here for you shortly to take you to the dinner party."

Sherry looked up at Nana. "You think I'm wrong, don't you, Nana?"

Nana shook her head. "It's not my decision, Sherry. It's you who must go through with it. It's you who must sit beside him tonight while the announcement of your marriage is made. I don't know if the bargain you made was a just one, child. Only time will tell that."

"I know I'm right, Nana," Sherry said softly. "It is at least something

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done for Thorne. Something I was powerless to do alone."

Nana didn't answer. She moved heavily over to a row of soft tunic gowns and busied herself in preparing them. . . .

AT NEW YORK'S central *tubetrain* depot, Lee Hudge waited restlessly in the dispatcher's office. To the clerk in charge of the office, Hudge said for the tenth time:

"What's holding that damned *tubetrain?*"

The clerk looked up in irritation. "I don't know, sir. I've told you we haven't had a report from it as yet."

Hudge drummed savagely on the edge of the *glassicade* railing at his elbow, his clawlike fingers repeating and repeating a rhythmic tattoo.

The *vizascreen* below the office dispatch board crackled into silver luminescence. The clerk sprang before it. Hudge looked up with tense expectancy.

A rocket engineer's face appeared on the screen.

"Tubetrain twelve, proceeding to New York after emergency stop," he said. "Details in report on arrival."

The screen crackled again, and the face faded from it.

Lee Hudge, smashing his hand flat against the railing, cursed disgustedly.

"Report on arrival!" he snorted. "Doesn't he realize consular officers are waiting for his arrival? Doesn't he realize that the information concerning the dangerous criminal he carries on that *tubetrain* is more important than his efforts to regain his schedule and make up lost time?"

The clerk, shrinking slightly from Hudge's wrath, remained silent.

"Get back in communication with that *tubetrain,*" Hudge blazed. "Find out the details of that delay. I'll be back here in a few minutes. I'll expect a report!"

He stalked from the office and out into the crowded depot waiting terminal. Shoving unceremoniously through the crowds that milled the huge hall, Hudge found his way to the pair of deputy consular officers he'd stationed in wait for the *tubetrain.*

"Evans," Hudge snapped at one. "Communicate with the office at headquarters. Tell them I want a special detail assigned to the highway entrances to the city—at once."

To the other deputy, Hudge said: "Stay here another five minutes. If I'm not back in that time return to headquarters and join a highway watch squad."

He fought his way back through the milling crowds to the dispatcher's office. The clerk inside waited expectantly, a little frightenedly, with the information he'd obtained.

"Well?" Hudge demanded.

"The prisoner you were waiting for, sir," said the clerk. "He slowed the train after knocking a conductor unconscious. It was near a tunnel emergency exit. He must have made his escape through there."

Hudge swore bitterly. "Just as I'd feared!" he grated. "A damned bunch of incompetent jackasses. I shouldn't have expected anything else!"

The clerk backed slightly away from Hudge's wrath, as though his words had physical force.

Lee Hudge stepped quickly over to a *communaboard* panel on the wall of the office. Swiftly, his finger flicked the dial numbers below the panel to the combination he desired. The panel screen grew saffron, then silver.

A girl's face appeared on the panel. Bellham's secretary.

"I want the commissioner," Hudge snapped.

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"I'm sorry, Officer Hudge," the girl's image declared. "He's left his office. I don't think he'll return. He has a dinner engagement at his estate in several hours. You might reach him there, if you try."

Hudge's lips went tight. "You get in touch with him for me, I haven't the time. Tell him I said Creegar gave us the slip once more, that he's still at large."

Hudge flicked the switch below the panel and turned away, starting for the door.

"Officer," the clerk said stammeringly, "if there's anything we can do—"

Hudge cut off the sentence with a savage glance of contempt. Then, wordlessly, he slammed out of the office . . .

THORNE CREEGAR walked several miles through the fields until he found the highway stretch he sought. Then he stepped out onto its hard shining surface, confident now that he'd thrown off any chance of a last minute pursuit.

He walked on perhaps a half mile along this stretch before he heard the approach of a *rockabout* in the distance, and then, grimly satisfied, he stepped to the center of the roadway and turned to face the direction from which the vehicle was coming.

When the rockabout grew into an increasingly larger blur in the distance, Creegar began waving his arms in signal. He continued this as the blur took shape and hurtled toward him.

Creegar knew now that he could be seen by the occupant, or occupants of the *rockabout,* and increased the frantic signals he directed toward it. Satisfied, he saw that it was slowing. He was directly in its headlights when at last it rolled to a stop less than five yards from him.

Creegar steppped out from the glare of the headlights and went around to the side of the rockabout. It was a sports model, driven by a sallow, pimple faced youth in a multicolored tunic jacket.

"Something wrong, buddy?" the youth asked, leaning out and peering out through the darkness at Creegar.

"Very much so," Creegar said. He drew his atomic pistol. "I'm urgently in need of a conveyance, my friend. I'm going to borrow yours. Hope when you get it back its still in one piece."

The youth's jaw fell slack, his face going ashen.

"Get out," Creegar ordered.

Frantically, the youth scrambled from the *rockabout,* obviously eager to do as he was told.

Creegar waved him contemptously over to the side of the highway with his atomic pistol. He climbed into the machine and behind the controls.

"Don't worry too much," Creegar advised him. "I think you'll get this back!" Then he gunned the rocket exhausts experimentally, shoved the atomic pistol back beneath his tunic jacket, released the pressure brakes and shot off. The white and startled face of the pimpled youth in the multi-colored tunic coat faded behind him. Ahead, in the darkness of the horizon, he could see the vast encompassing glow that haloed the metropolis of New York. His jaw set in a tight line. He was closer, and every minute that passed would bring him still closer to the fulfillment of his burning vengeance . . .

LEE HUDGE, moving swiftly along the line of powerful red colored scout *rockabouts,* which comprised the emergency squad of the Law Commis-

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sion's Highway Patrol, gave his final instructions to the deputies behind their controls.

"All possible avenues of entrance are to be scoured," Hudge declared emphatically. "Not a vehicle is to be allowed to pass without a search. You all have descriptions of the man. You're instructed to bring him in dead, if that's the only way you can do it. But bring him in you must, or God help you!"

He stepped back to his own staff patrol *rockabout,* climbing in beside the uniformed driver who sat behind the wheel. The long line of *rockabouts* blasted into life, the flame from their tubes spitting through the darkness.

Hudge licked his thin lips in unconscious anticipation . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Inside New York

WHEN Judson Bellham left his ornate offices in the Federation Law Commission buildings, he was unaware that Lee Hudge was at that moment unsuccessfully trying to get in touch with him from the dispatch office of the *tube-train* terminal.

Preoccupied with the thoughts of the dinner party to which he was already slightly late, Bellham hastily ordered his *rockabout* run from the building's storage ramp, and waited impatiently for it on the sidewalk of the crowded thorofare.

And it was less than a minute before the attendant brought his *rockabout* to the curb, when the seedy litle man in spacefaring garb of soiled raggedness nudged him.

Bellham looked down, startled, and then into his red face there came a deeper crimson flush of anxiety and swift rage. But there was recognition, too, in that glance.

"Important," the little space tar murmured, looking away from Bellham. He was bandy-legged, gnarled. His face was space seamed. "Important," he repeated. "Shipments arriving tonight. Skipper has a case of jitters."

Bellham, taking a cue from the little space tar, turned his head slightly, scarcely moving his lips in the hot retort he hissed.

"Damn you, why in the hell are you insane enough to come here?"

"Important," the little man hissed fiercely this time. "There was no other way to get in touch with you. Didn't risk the regular channels." He paused. "Skipper didn't dare. Jittery, I tell you."

"The double crossing Venusian swine!" Bellham spat. "This sounds like another underhand move. I'm not forgetting his handling of the assignment I gave him today!" There was venom in his voice.

The gnarled little space tar still pretended to look the other way, casually squirting a stream of Venusian tobacco juice onto the curb.

"Take your choice," he hissed. "The skipper just didn't like the way you tried to make him run small-time errands. But he's dumping the shipment tonight. Space port. Smart thing to get down there."

Bellham was fighting hard to control the vast surging rage which sent the blood pounding to his temples.

"Tell him I'll be there. Tell him one more double-cross will sign his death warrant!"

The *rockabout* pulled up before them, then. The little space tar strolled casually onward, not looking back. Crimson faced, Bellham forced himself to keep his rage in check, forced himself to climb in behind the controls of his *rockabout.*

Savagely, he threw the throttle for-

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ward, shattering the air with the deafening concussion of the rocket tubes' blasting. The *rockabout* shot from the curb and out into the roaring traffic lanes. Bellham, hands gripped tightly to the controls, realized that his palms were damp, his forehead beaded with sweat.

Wrathfully, he cursed. But his overwhelming rage did nothing to ease the horribly nibbling doubt. He threw the throttle still farther forward, and the *rockabout* leaped onward with ever mounting speed . . .

THORNE CREEGAR, still speeding through the darkness toward the city, saw the headlights of the *rockabout* roaring toward him after he'd been behind the controls of his own commandeered vehicle less than thirty minutes.

And abruptly, the moment his eyes picked out the pinpoints of light that pointed out the other *rockabout*, he eased down the throttle lever gradually back. Moments later, when the pinpoints of light roaring down the highway toward him had grown larger, his mouth went tight in satisfaction and he slowed his own machine to a stop along the right side of the highway.

Creegar clambered out of the *rockabout* swiftly then, pausing once to glance again at the approaching machine. Then he crossed swiftly to the other side of the highway, taking cover in the concealment of a narrow underpass abutment.

He waited there, as the rockabout continued to bear down toward the stalled machine he'd left on the other side of the highway. Less than two minutes later the headlights of the approaching vehicle picked out the silhouette of the stalled machine.

The approaching *rockabout* slowed cautiously, easing up on the deserted vehicle suspiciously. It halted ten feet from the *rockabout* Creegar had left there, almost directly opposite Creegar's hiding place.

The outline of the machine, and its scarlet coloring, told Creegar even before the uniformed consular patrol officers emerged from either door, that his suspicions in regard to its identity had been correct.

There were only two of the patrol officers, however, and now both of them were advancing on the deserted *rockabout*. They both carried drawn atomic pistols, and stepped in at the stalled machine from opposite sides.

Creegar tensed himself. He heard a startled exclamation from one of the officers.

"Strange—no one here!"

The second officer muttered something conveying equal surprise. The first jerked the door of the *rockabout* open. Creegar edged out slightly from his concealment.

"Take a look in the other side," the first officer called. The second stepped forward, opening the other door. Creegar tensed himself.

The pair stuck their heads into the deserted *rockabout*. This was like a starter's gun to Creegar. He leaped from his concealment, dashing with head lowered toward the consular patrol *rockabout* only fifteen feet away from him and directly in his path.

He made the door as he heard the shouted exclamation from one of the officers.

"There he is!"

And then Creegar was in the patrol *rockabout*, his fingers finding the throttle lever and flicking the rocket tubes to instant life. One of the officers had left the deserted vehicle and was running toward the patrol *rockabout*. He was waving his atomic pistol indecisively.

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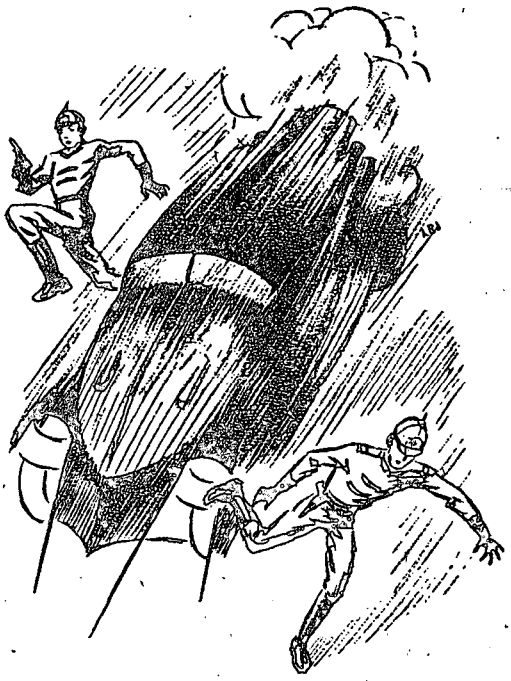
Creegar bent his head low behind the shield before the control panel.



The officers leaped frantically aside

He thundered the *rockabout* directly at the figure of the officer standing in the center of the highway. He had a blurred vision of that worthy's body leaping frantically to one side, and then Creegar swung the machine sharply about, rocketting back just in time to repeat the process on the second officer, who was also forced to leap aside to save his life.

Now Thorne Creegar was headed for New York, and in a machine that could run the gauntlet of patrol without question. He knew the speed of the rockets beneath him, and found additional comfort in the knowledge that it would be impossible to try to pursue him in the machine he had abandoned.

Time, now, was the only object standing between Thorne Creegar and his goal. And every second lessened that . . .

LEE HUDGE cursed impatiently as he looked at the chronometer of the control panel of the patrol *rockabout* in which he sat. His driver, eyes riveted to the shining stretch of roadway before him, squirmed slightly in anticipation of the outburst that seemed due.

"More time wasted," Hudge snapped irritably. "I'm beginning to wonder what in the hell sort of efficiency this damned outfit has." His pale eyes were frosted in anger. "One man against the entire local forces of the Federation Law Commission, and he's still at large. Get in touch with the other squads again."

The driver reached forward to the panel and took the communiphone from the hook. Controlling the machine with one hand, he held the instrument with the other, speaking into it.

"All call," he said into the mouthpiece. "All call. General report to central patrol headquarters."

Hudge gazed impatiently out at the roadside whipping by, while his driver waited for the answering reports to come in from the other *rockabouts*.

Several minutes passed, then the driver placed the communiphone back in place before the panel. Still keeping his eyes on the roadway ahead, he said to Hudge: "Others reporting in, sir. No trace as yet. All patrols accounted for excepting number twelve. No report from that *rockabout*, Sir."

"No report?" Hudge's voice was harsh.

"No, sir."

"Try that patrol again," Hudge ordered.

The driver once more took communiphone from the panel hook. He spoke into the mouthpiece. "Special, patrol twelve. Report at once to central *rockabout*. Report at once."

The silence was heavy for fully thirty

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seconds while Hudge and his driver waited.

The driver took his eyes from the roadway, glancing at Hudge for the first time. There was alarm in his voice.

"Still no answering report from twelve, sir."

Hudge, with ominous quiet, said: "Try once more." His lips were set tightly in a thin line.

Again the driver repeated the call. Again the silence. His voice, this time, was definitely shaky.

"No answer, sir."

"Take me back to the Law Commission offices immediately," Hudge snapped. "Get in touch with patrol ten. Tell them to cover the route assigned to twelve. Tell them to call in at the Commission offices the instant they learn anything about the maneuvers of that other patrol."

The driver swung the *rockabout* to the left and up a steep incline that would come around toward the direction Hudge had ordered. Once on the highway above, he bent toward the communiphone panel hook.

"Calling," the driver said. "Calling. Ten. Ten. Ten. Take over patrol route of twelve. Report to Commission offices the moment anything is learned." He placed the instrument back on the panel.

"There's little doubt," Hudge said half aloud and to himself, "that that's where he's heading if he's gotten through us." Then, grimly, he settled back, eyes half lidded, as the rockabout sped back toward the Commission offices in New York . . .

CREEGAR deserted the crimson patrol *rockabout* on a third layer highway in the downtown heart of the metropolis. He waited only to watch it lifted on the ramp parking apparatus, then he turned off, found the lift moving down to the pedestrian lanes,* and stepped into it.

It was only a matter of four blocks to the buildings which housed the offices of the Federation Law Commission, and Creegar found himself unconsciously pausing now and then to look about at the towering splendor of the metropolis. Five years on a tiny hell hole of a penal planet had almost completely erased his recollections of the familiar sights of New York.

But now this very alien feeling served to evoke bitterness and increased determination rather than nostalgia. This was the world from which he had been barred. This was the world from which he was even now an exile. This was the society, the civilization, that had torn from him his last vestiges of hope, respect, decency.

He could see the towering central structure of the Federation Law Commission ahead of him, stretching two hundred stories into the glare of the starless sky. He could see the highways, layers on layers of them, ribboning and spiralling around the five hundred foot statue that crested the smallest, and oldest of the Federation Law Commission buildings. The statue of the Goddess of Justice.

Creegar's lips went flat against his white teeth in a humorless and sardonic grin. Justice, the symbol of this world of super perfection—this civilization without error—the civilization that weighed, and judged, and cast from it the unworthy elements.

Once he had been a part of it. Now

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* *Pedestrian lanes.* Twenty-third century civilization solved its traffic difficulties with a graduated highway system for all mechanical traffic. The ground level pedestrian lanes, walled off from mechanical traffic were accessible through elevator systems at every block and intersection. Thus, people leaving vehicles merely had to step into these elevators to be taken down to the pedestrian, or ground level, lanes.

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he was an outcast, an alien. These people who thronged past him even now. These smiling, laughing, chattering people had once been warm and friendly and alike. But that was before their era of perfection had cast him from them.

It was four minutes later when Creegar arrived at the central building of the Federation Law Commission.

Creegar moved through the crowds unnoticed, stepping into the vast lobby of the central building and into a compression elevator moments later. At the hundred and fiftieth floor, he stepped from the elevator and into a deserted corridor. The feeling that assailed him as he walked down the corridor was once again bitter and alien in the recollections it brought back.

At the turn of the corridor there was another passage, narrower and briefer than the one before. Another elevator was at the end of this smaller passage. An orderly, gray tuniced and wearing an atomic pistol holstered importantly to his side, stood before this single lift.

He saw Creegar approaching, his eyes noting the plain shabbiness of Creegar's tunic, the kitsack strapped to his shoulder. He moved forward toward him.

"Sorry," said the orderly, "you must be on the wrong floor. Nothing but Commission offices above this floor."

He was a thickset, squat and burly shouldered fellow. His tone was unnecessarily authoritative.

"You haven't given me any startling information," Creegar said quietly. "I know where I am and where I'm going."

The orderly's face reddened, he stepped swiftly up to Creegar, his hand dropping to his holstered atomic pistol.

"Listen, space bum," he began.

He had a weapon half out of the holster when Creegar's slicing left hook caught him on the chin. Expressionlessly, Creegar watched the orderly reel back against the wall. Then he stepped in and caught him with a right uppercut, vicious, final. The orderly slumped to the floor, eyes closed.

Creegar lifted the orderly to his feet, and dragged him to the door of a maintenance closet. He opened this, shoved the inert body of the orderly inside, closed it, and snapped the outside lock. Then he stepped over to the automatic power percussion elevator.

This was the private lift used only by consular officers of the Federation Law Commission. Creegar himself had used it so many countless times that his operation of the mechanism now was automatic. It stopped at any one of ten floors spaced through the fifty remaining stories to the roof. But in between the ninth and the tenth stop, Creegar knew, there was another. A little known and seldom used outlet for the private purposes of the commissioner.

Creegar set the mechanism for this floor, and the outlet that would lead him directly to Bellham's private offices.

When the elevator arrived at this secret floor stop, Creegar set the mechanism so that it could not be used again until he released it. He stepped out, then, into a thickly carpeted little corridor at the end of which there was a heavy door paneled in *Junovian* ebony. Silently, he moved down the corridor to this door. Cautiously, he placed his hand on the entrance panel and felt the door give behind the weight he put against it.

He listened for an instant. Listened to see if any sound came from the luxurious private office on the other side of that door. There was only silence.

Creegar pushed the door full open, stepping swiftly into the softly lighted

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room. In his hand he held his atomic pistol ready.

THE luxuriously furnished room, Judson Bellham's private office, was deserted.

Creegar closed the door noiselessly behind him, and still holding the atomic pistol before him, moved to the center of the room.

There was another door at the far end of the room. A door which, Creegar knew, led to the general offices where Bellham's secretaries worked.

Creegar stepped across the room to this door and stood there a moment listening. From the faint buzzing sound that came to his ears, he was aware that only the communications board was in use, and that the only person out there would be one of the secretaries busily taking the messages for the following day. He opened this door slightly, peering out into the other office through the crack. His assumption was correct. The only occupant of that office was a secretary, absorbed in detail work at the far end of that large room.

Softly, Creegar closed the door again, snapping the *electrolock* switch on it as he did so.

Then Creegar turned back to survey Bellham's office. Grimly, he stepped over to the desk in the center of the room and began quickly rifling the drawers. One sheaf he came across, labeled, "The Creegar Case," he flicked through with bitter contempt, then tore crosswise and threw on the floor.

There were other papers, most of them official in nature, some of them personal. But none of them contained what Creegar sought. He finished his search through the desk and stepped over to a series of wall files. These, too, revealed nothing of the evidence he sought.

Creegar stepped swiftly over to one of the ebony paneled walls. He thought a moment, recalling to mind the panel he sought, then his fingers pressed hard against it. It swung inward, revealing a small safe.

Five years before, Creegar had been the only man other than Judson Bellham who knew the combination of this small safe. Now, frowning, he searched his memory, and after several minutes began expertly flicking the dial along the electro-combination units. An instant later, and he was swinging the safe open.

And at that instant, just as Creegar was groping for the papers inside the safe, he heard the sudden *clacking* of the *wordagraph* machine in the corner of the room.

Creegar wheeled, looking at the machine as it continued to jump along inside its *glassicade* confinement, his eyes gazing puzzledly at the message ribboning forth from the paper roller it contained.

That was Bellham's private machine. It was not connected with the communications board in the outer office, Creegar recalled. It received private messages from outside the city. It was obvious that whoever was sending the message *clacking* forth from the machine at this instant imagined Bellham to be in the office.

Creegar left the safe momentarily and stepped across to the *wordagraph*. He looked down at the message rolling forth just as the machine stopped.

"REPEAT. SPACE PORT
VITAL. DON'T FAIL."

There was no signature. Creegar frowned, rereading the message. Obviously it was meant for Bellham. But what did it mean? Who was its source?

Creegar shook his head frowningly, then left the side of the machine and went back to the wall safe. Again he was groping his hand toward the pa-

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pers inside, when another sound arrested him.

The sound of a voice behind him.

A voice he would never forget.

"Stay right as you are, Creegar, until I tell you to turn!"

The high, hard, grimly triumphant voice of Lee Hudge!

CHAPTER IX

Hudge Strikes

THORNE CREEGAR felt his heart grow cold inside him. His palms were suddenly damp, his forehead moist. His stomach went through a series of swift acrobatics.

Hudge, from the sound of his voice, was coming across the room toward him.

"That's right, Creegar. Just hold that pose. No tricks."

Then Creegar felt Hudge's hands flicking expertly, swiftly, through his tunic pockets. They found the atomic pistol and removed it.

"Now," said Hudge. His voice this time indicated that he had stepped back a pace. "Turn around, slowly."

Creegar turned around, gazing into the muzzle of Hudge's atomic pistol. Above the gun, Hudge's gray face was haloed in unholy exaltation of triumph. His pale eyes were hard and bright, his mouth sadistically tight in pleasure.

"Been a long time since I've had this pleasure, Creegar," Hudge said in his high thin voice. "I heard you dropped in on this planet, and I've been awfully impatient waiting to see you."

Creegar's lips went flat against his white, even teeth. His eyes were hard with contempt.

"Go ahead, bloodhound," he spat. "Pump some atomic slugs into my stomach. Burn an arm off if it pleases your fancy."

Lee Hudge smiled thinly. "Why should I, Creegar? Justice will take care of your case from now on. Justice almost erred when you were released. But that will soon be rectified. It was probably just as well you were released. It put your neck right where it ought to be. Now the job will be done thoroughly."

"Where is Bellham?" Creegar asked tonelessly.

Hudge gave another thin imitation of a smile. "You'd like to top off your rotten record by murdering him, wouldn't you?" He paused. "Bellham is at his estate. As soon as his dinner party is through, I'm sure he'll be delighted to know you asked about him. He'll probably even pass on the word to Sherry Bennet."

Hudge's sentence cut deep into Creegar's chest. There was a swift, sharp, horribly wrenching ache, and the pain of the lash was mirrored in his eyes.

Lee Hudge read this instantly. He grinned.

"That dinner party tonight is to announce the forthcoming marriage of Sherry to Judson Bellham, Creegar. I have a hunch you aren't aware of that. I don't imagine they let you keep up with the social news in the home you occupied for the last five years."

If the very mention of Sherry's name had been a lash to Creegar, this tore raggedly into his soul itself. His face went hard in disbelief, then deadly rage.

"You lousy swine, Hudge!"

Hudge shrugged. "Anyway you like it, Creegar. Just because I try to keep you abreast of the social whirl is no reason for blowing your brains out in rage."

Creegar seemed to reel. His eyes were clouded with nameless aching emotions. He put his hands to his face. Against the rage that was dying inside

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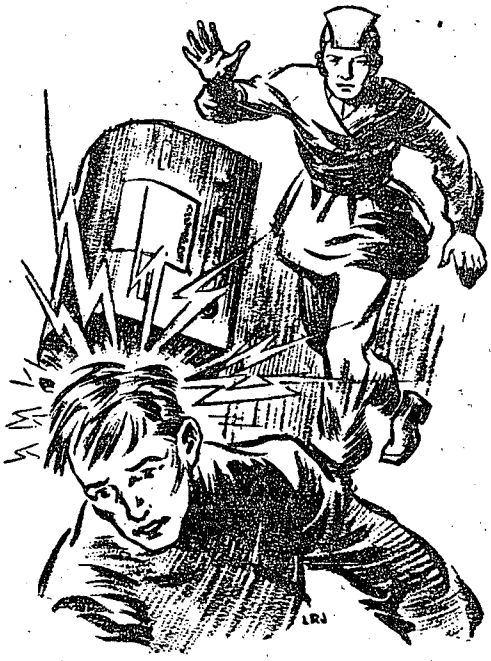
him grew a sickening, overpowering realization that what Lee Hudge was saying was the truth.

Hudge waved the atomic pistol in his hand.

"Step away from the wall, Creegar. Move over to that door." He pointed to the door that led to the outer offices. The door through which he'd entered to surprise Creegar.

Blindly, Creegar started across the room. His hands hung limply at his sides. His gait was uncertain. His shoulders had slumped brokenly. A red torrent of pain and rage was swimming wildly around in his brain.

HE was passing the desk when something inside him broke asunder, releasing the tidal wave of hate and fury and anguish that had welled behind the walls of his indominatable will for five hideous years.



Creegar hurled the heavy box

Thorne Creegar went temporarily insane.

Wheeling, he grabbed for the wireless communication box on Bellham's desk. He didn't hear Hudge's shouted, startled warning as his hands closed around it. He heard nothing but the raging swelling torrent of madness that thundered inside his brain.

Hudge shouted warning a second time before he fired.

But Creegar hurled the heavy box at Hudge's skull instants before the atomic pistol blasted forth. And then through a red screen of rage, Creegar saw Hudge's face, bloody and anguished, sinking to the floor.

Creegar stumbled toward Hudge's prostrate form. Stumbled forward with his hands working madly in the impulse to take that scrawny neck between his strong fingers and choke the life from that body.

And as suddenly as it had come upon him, the madness washed away. And Creegar stood there, reeling drunkenly, the smell of his own burned flash acrid in his nostrils.

It was then he realized numbly that his left shoulder was throbbing violently, and that Hudge's single shot had blazed deeply into the flesh there.

Creegar looked down at Hudge, then. The little consular officer lay sprawled face forward on the thick rug, blood pooling from a deep gash—caused by the side of the box—on the side of his head.

Lee Hudge didn't seem to be alive.

Creegar shuddered. Then he stepped around the body and picked up the atomic pistol that had fallen from Hudge's hand. He straightened up, then, and staggered over to the door that opened onto the outer offices.

They were deserted. Hudge had apparently come alone. The communications board operator had fled, undoubtedly for help, when she'd heard the struggle.

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Like a man in a trance, Creegar turned away, stuffing the atomic pistol in his tunic, and moving back across the room to the door by which he'd entered.

He found the elevator at the end of the small corridor. He stumbled dazedly, weakly, into it . . .

JUDSON BELLHAM'S white, even smile concealed the nervous tension that mounted inside him as he stood in the drawing room of his luxurious country manor receiving the guests for his dinner party.

Attired impeccably in formal tunic garb, Bellham smilingly nodded to a guest, made a general answer to a general remark, then abruptly murmured an inaudible apology, excusing himself.

Swiftly, Bellham moved from the drawing room through the other rooms already crowded with guests until at last he closed the door behind him in the seclusion of his study.

He mopped his brow, then, and stepped to his desk, where he pressed an electronic buzzer. A moment later, clad in the striped tunic of a butler, a short, bald, wiry little man appeared.

"You want me, chief?"

Bellham nodded. "Anything else on word from the space port, Mecks?"

Mecks shook his bald head. "Nothing. But I'm standing by for another word from 'em. It should be coming shortly." He paused, then: "What're you going to do about that deal, chief?"

Bellham's eyes were troubled, even though his voice was harsh. "I'll settle that double-crossing swine, Mecks. I'll settle him for good. It's nothing more than a damned hold-up. He thinks he can get away with it, but he won't."

Mecks smiled in anticipation of action. "You'll need a few of the boys, then?" he asked.

Bellham nodded. "I'll want you along. You can bring Hapes, and any two others who'll be able to keep their mouths shut." He paused. "Go upstairs and see if Miss Bennet is ready yet, Mecks. She's been up there ever since she arrived. She'll have to take over the welcoming of the guests while I'm at the space port."

Mecks face was inscrutable. "Sure, chief. How long you think the job'll take us?"

"Not long," Bellham promised, "if we work fast."

Mecks disappeared, and Bellham rose, lighting an expensive Venusian cigar. He took three or four draughts from it, then threw it violently to the floor, crushing it into the rich rug with his foot.

He wondered what had happened to Hudge, and why he hadn't heard from him by now. Cursing, he started from the room . . .

IN the Captain's cabin on the dirty little Venusian space cargo craft, the bandy-legged little space tar sloppily saluted his fat and blue jowled skipper who sat on his bunk holding a bottle and a glass.

"You pass the word on to him?" the Venusian captain asked.

The space tar nodded, grinning. "He almost blew his mental rockets right there on the street."

The Venusian captain laughed heartily, blue jowls shaking.

"That's fine. Fine. Were you able to learn how the lad is progressing?"

"I found out that they haven't nabbed him yet. He's still at large. Slipped out of four traps laid for him already."

The Venusian skipper nodded in satisfaction. "Good. I like that boy. I think he'll be able to take care of himself. Even with Bellham's bloodhounds

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on his scent."

The space tar started toward the door. He paused.

"When do you want the cargo brought topside?" he asked.

"Not until we're ready to unload," the space skipper answered him. "I think it will prove very damned embarrassing to the law commissioner, eh?"

"He'll come ready to play the game for big stakes," the space tar said reflectively. "Our hides won't be worth a damn if he has anything to say about it."

"We'll be waiting for him, and we'll be ready," the Venusian skipper said reassuringly.

"We're losing a damned fine thing by this," said the bandy legged little chap.

"You boys maybe want to back out on me?" the Venusian space skipper asked, the humor leaving his eyes.

The tar shook his head rapidly. "You've never let us down yet. We're with you, every last one of the crew." He suddenly grinned. "Hell, where would we be stepping out on you now, even if we wanted to?"

The Venusian captain laughed. "Good sense," he commended. Then: "Get word to Bellham's estate over the private outlet. Repeat our message. We can't afford to let him miss this landing."

The bandy legged little space tar made another sloppy salute and stepped out of the cabin . . .

CHAPTER X

Hudge Returns

THORNE CREEGAR felt the wind whipping his cheeks, and was aware that the cowling of the *rockabout* he'd commandeered was open. He realized, too, numbly, that he was speeding along a stretch of suburban highway and that there was an automatic destination commanding his dazed mind.

And then, after four more miles, he was aware that the highway was turning in a familiar series of graduated curves, climbing high along a cliff side overlooking the sea.

Miles after that, Creegar saw ahead of him the huge, brightly lighted mansion.

Judson Bellham's country estate.

Bellham was there. Hudge had said he was to be there. And Sherry. Creegar closed his eyes against the thought of Sherry and the bewildering pain it brought.

There was one thought blazed searingly into Creegar's mind. The destruction of Judson Bellham. He would kill him, throttle him with his bare hands.

Creegar's fingers tightened convulsively around the controls of the *rockabout* at this thought.

Then, minutes later, he was bringing the *rockabout* around through the seaside driveway that led to the grounds of the mansion. This was the rear entrance. His selection of it had been automatic.

In the shelter of thick trees, Creegar halted his machine and climbed out. From his tunic he tore the atomic pistol he'd taken from Lee Hudge.

From the open windows of the brightly lighted mansion as he advanced cautiously across the wide stretch of lawn, Creegar could hear soft music, human voices, laughter.

Creegar made his way to the wall length window that opened before an unoccupied veranda. There, in the concealment of the darkness, he looked into the brightly lighted interior of the Bellham drawing room.

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It was filled with formally attired men and women. Bellham's guests. Creegar recognized many of them. But his eyes paused nowhere, continuing to search that crowd for the hated form of Judson Bellham.

Bellham was not there.

Creegar went on then, furtively, to other windows. Bellham was in none of the other rooms. And then Creegar saw the light in the large second floor window. Bellham's study.

Judson Bellham would be up there.

Creegar went around the house until he found a trellis strong enough to hold his weight.

Moments later, he stood on the ledge outside the window of Bellham's study. The heavy drapes, although showing light, kept him from seeing into the room. Hesitating only a moment, Creegar raised his arm, holding the atomic pistol by the barrel.

He brought it crashing into the glassicade pane of the window. Once, twice, he smashed against that surface as it splintered beneath the blows. Then he was kicking the remaining segments of glassicade away with his foot, stepping into the room.

CREEGAR stood in the room, atomic pistol held in his hand, staring at the startled girl who faced him.

Sherry Bennet!

"Thorne!" the name was torn from Sherry's lips in a startled exclamation of incredulity, terror and anguish.

"I never knew," Creegar said thickly.

"Oh, Thorne!" Sherry started toward him now.

"Stand back!" Creegar's words were like blows. He raised the atomic pistol, training it on Sherry.

White faced, her hazel eyes welling in bewildered fear, Sherry paused.

"I never know," Creegar said harshly, "that you'd be with the rest of them. I never imagined that you'd been in on the scheme from the start. I thought it was all Bellham's doing. You might have thought of a less horrible manner of eliminating me, Sherry. You might have—" His words trailed off, and he swayed slightly as the pain in his shoulder stabbed searingly across his dazed mind.

Then, thickly, Creegar demanded: "Where's Bellham?"

"Thorne," Sherry sobbed, "you're wounded!"

"I killed Lee Hudge," Creegar said thickly. "Now it's Bellham I want. Where is he?"

Sherry's cheeks were wet with tears. "Oh, Thorne, Thorne," she sobbed. "What have they done to you? What have they made of you? Please, please let me help you. Put down that gun. I beg you, Thorne. Let me help you get away from here before it's too late."

"Where is Bellham?" Creegar repeated.

"He's not here, Thorne," Sherry said desperately. "I don't know where he's gone. But he'll be back, and then they'll crucify you. Leave, please leave!"

In the corner of the study, a miniature, *glassicade* enclosed *wordagraph* started clacking.

Creegar looked at it dazedly, and still keeping the atomic pistol trained on Sherry, stumbled over to it. The clacking ceased as he reached its side.

The message that had just come through swam before his eyes as he tried to bring it into focus.

"REPEAT. SPACE PORT VITAL. DON'T FAIL."

Creegar rubbed his left hand across his eyes, then he turned from the machine. This was the same message that had come through on the larger *wordagraph* in Bellham's office, he realized

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foggily. Space port. Space port.

He waved the atomic pistol at Sherry.

"You'll come with me," he declared thickly. "You'll come with me. Bellham is at the space port. I can't leave you here to spread the alarm. You'll come with me."

Sherry gazed at him, then decision came into her torment filled eyes.

"Yes, Thorne. I'll go with you," she said softly.

Creegar motioned to the shattered window. "There. Only exit. Go ahead of me."

Sherry hesitated an instant. Creegar waved the gun in mute command. Sherry moved over to the window. Creegar followed behind her . . . .

THROUGH the blackness of the space harbor, the tiny flotilla of six single rocket lifecraft nosed carefully along toward the landing wharfs.

In the lead craft, the Venusian captain, a rank cigar between his fat lips, softly issued orders to his bandy-legged little helmsman.

"Cut rocket," he said quietly.

"A harbor patrol in sight?" the little pilot asked.

The Venusian captain shook his head. "No. Bellham wouldn't risk that. He'll have to handle this himself. We don't have to worry about patrols. But we can't risk drawing attention from some of the larger space craft in the harbor. They might do their own looking around."

The craft glided along on the momentum remaining, and the others in the small flotilla behind it also cut off power.

Minutes later, the Venusian captain said: "All right. Open rocket power again. Wharfside three bursts off."

The bandy-legged space tar gave the tube a triple throttle, then cut it abruptly. His hand found the degravitator brake, and the small space craft settled slowly downward.

"Good," the Captain commended. "Make temporary mooring, and we'll get the others unloaded."

Scant minutes after that, ten grizzled space tars, under the swift and quiet direction of the Venusian captain, were unloading thick crates onto the rusted planking of the dark and deserted wharf.

When the cargo was finally transfered to the wharf, the fat space skipper called his men before him.

"You know the instructions," he said softly. "A brief display of resistance, then surrender. Have several crates half-opened by the time they arrive. Be apparently at work on the others. Good luck. Stand by."

He turned, motioning the bandy-legged space tar who had piloted his own craft. The two of them clambered back into the lifecraft. Thirty seconds later, it coughed into rocket power and shot up and away from the wharfside . . . .

JUDSON BELLHAM, in the first of the two *rockabouts* shooting along the super-highway toward the space port, hunched grimly forward beside the wiry, baldheaded little Mecks.

"He'll be expecting conversation, maybe a deal, a pay-off," Bellham said angrily. "But that's where he'll make his mistake. There won't be any pay-off. I'll shut his mouth the easy way. The sure way."

"What about the stuff?" Mecks said. "It'd be a crime to let it go to waste. Couldn't the boys bring it in?"

Bellham shook his head. "Not this time. Not under these circumstances. Too risky. Leave it there. The bodies will be found around it, and I'll see that the commission interprets the

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whole thing as a hi-jack attempt gone wrong."

"You'll be cutting off a good entry for future use," Mecks reminded him.

"There are other entries," Bellham said. "And even this one will only be cut off temporarily."

Mecks said nothing. The *rockabout* thundered down on a cross maze of graduated highway levels.

"Take the rear road to the old wharfs," Bellham instructed his driver. They swerved off sharply into the narrow underpass Bellham had indicated. Behind them, Bellham noted in the *vizapanel,* the other *rockabout* continued to follow.

Minutes after that, Mecks suddenly cut the power on the *rockabout.* They were moving through almost inky darkness in the unlighted underpass now, and proceeding at half the former speed.

"Only a quarter of a mile ahead," Bellham said suddenly. "Halt it in another hundred yards."

They came to a stop. Bellham was the first out of the *rockabout.* The machine behind them was just drawing to a stop. Mecks was out beside Bellham now.

Three men climbed out of the second *rockabout* and joined them. All had swarthy, pock-marked skin, the almost inevitable identification tags of Saturnians.

Bellham took a large, vicious looking atomic pistol from his tunic. Mecks had already brought his own into view. The others displayed similar weapons.

"I'll approach the wharf from the right, with Mecks," Bellham said. "You three come up from the left, but delay for two minutes after we start. When you step in, shoot if you have to; but only if you have to. I don't think they'll resist at first. They expect bartering."

Bellham started off through the darkness with Mecks at his side. Ahead of them, faintly, they could hear muffled voices coming from the abandoned space wharf.

"The swine are already there," Bellham grated. . . .

CREEGAR was fighting hard against the sick dizziness that assailed him with every necessary motion of his badly injured left shoulder. The roadway ahead of him blurred dangerously into silver mist with ever suceeding second, and it required every last ounce of his tortured will power to keep the thundering *rockabout* on the stretch of highway.

On the seat beside him, Sherry Bennet lay gagged and bound. Her hazel eyes mute testimony of the anguish and terror she was enduring.

Creegar didn't see the approaching maze of graduated super-highways until it was almost upon him, and then, acting merely by instinct, he threw the *rockabout* into a sharp, twisting turn, thundering into a darkened underpass. It would be at the deserted wharfs, he realized thickly through the pain. The wharfs were all such—

The outlines of the two *rockabouts* ahead of him abruptly cut off his chain of dogged rationalization. He cut the power of his rocket motors, braking hard to a halt behind the two other machines.

Creegar climbed from his *rockabout* with painfully difficult exertion. His knees, as he hit the rusty wharf planking, seemed for an instant to refuse to support his tortured body. And then he found balance, and moved lurchingly, almost blindly, to the machines ahead of him.

He had the atomic pistol once again in his hand, and he held it in readiness as he came up behind the first of the

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two *rockabouts*. It was deserted.

The second was the same.

Swaying there in the darkness, atomic pistol held tightly in his right hand, Creegar fought off another sharp, terrible wave of nausea and weakness. Then he started forward.

Faintly, coming from the wharfs ahead of him, Creegar could hear voices. They grew more audible as he moved on. The burning, blinding agony that seared his senses prevented him from making anything coherent from them, even when he was but five feet from the wharf landing platform of a decrepit warehouse.

But one thing Creegar caught from those voices. One of them belonged to Judson Bellham!

He leaned against the side of the decrepit warehouse, gaining what precious strength he could, steeling himself against the action that was to come. Several minutes he remained this way, and then he straightened up, forcing himself through sheer strength of will, to move unfalteringly.

Creegar stepped around the corner of the warehouse onto the wharf landing platform.

TIME hung in eternity in the instant that Creegar's vision focused the scene for his brain.

Around a group of crates, some of them opened, stood five men with atomic pistols trained on a knot of ten men. These holding the others at bay, backs to Creegar, were unaware of Creegar's entrance. Bellham commanded these. Encircled by Bellham's men were ten, ragged space tars, hands upraised.

"We'll wait," Bellham was saying, "until your captain arrives. Then we'll take care of the lot of you."

Then Creegar heard a voice barking commandingly, "Drop those pistols. Turn slowly!" The voice was his own.

Six weapons clattered to the rusty wharf planks. Judson Bellham was the first to turn. His face went ashen as he saw Thorne Creegar. His lips moved soundlessly. His hands, above his head, twitched spasmodically.

"Be careful, Bellham," Creegar said raggedly. "Be very careful, unless you want to die five minutes sooner than I've planned."

"Creegar!" The name came from Bellham's lips like a hoarse ejaculation.

"Back from hell—looking for recruits," Creegar snarled.

In Bellham's glance, Creegar read a swift appraisal. Bellham had noted the fact that he was badly wounded, had noted, too, that only sheer dogged will and flaming hatred held Creegar still on his feet.

Creegar saw this, and fought to steady himself. The effort brought additional beads of cold sweat to his brow.

"No ideas, Bellham," he warned. "No ideas, or I'll—"

Creegar saw something else in Bellham's eyes, then—something swift, flickering, hopeful.

And then Creegar heard a voice behind him. A high, hard, thin voice. The voice of Lee Hudge!

"Put down that pistol, Creegar!"

And even as that voice rang out, Judson Bellham crouched swiftly, retrieving the atomic pistol on the wharf planking. He had it trained on Creegar in one, swift gesture. His face was frozen in hatred.

Thorne Creegar fired at the same instant that Judson Bellham did. Fired twice before the heavy blow from behind knocked him aside and down.

And as Thorne Creegar sprawled to the wharf planking, his will gave way before the forces of pain and weakness that had battered so long for entrance.

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Darkness swam in around him. There was no resisting it this time.

But before the ebon tide engulfed him completely, Creegar had the infinite satisfaction of seeing Judson Bellham, smoking atomic weapon still in his hand, pitching forward, face frozen in a death mask of hate and astonishment. . . .

IT WAS many hours later that Creegar emerged from the torrent of nightmarish fever, to find that Sherry's face was bent above his own. Her cheeks were wet, her hazel eyes misty, her lovely mouth forming a tremulous smile of joyous relief.

Creegar sensed that the whiteness around him was the antiseptic whiteness of a hospital ward. He heard Sherry's voice saying one sentence over and over again to him.

"It's all right, darling. It's all right."

He closed his eyes then, and his groping hand found Sherry's, and the darkness that returned to him was merciful now.

Sherry was there the following morning, when Creegar again opened his eyes. He had the strength, now, to move his lips. He formed a question.

"Later, Thorne," Sherry said. "Later, when your strength is back."

It was exactly five days later that his questions were answered. And they wheeled his bed out into the sun drenched solarium, while Sherry sat beside him.

"You didn't kill Hudge, Thorne," she told him. "Poor bloodhound that he is, it would take an atomic cannon to kill him."

To the question in Creegar's eyes, she replied.

"He found the incriminating evidence on Bellham in the safe you'd left open. The evidence you'd left there is your frantic pursuit of Bellham. It was probably just as well that you were badly dazed from your wound. You might have taken it with you otherwise."

"But instead, he found it and read it, eh?" Creegar said.

Sherry nodded. "I imagine it must have been a tremendous pill for him to swallow. But he was straight. Justice was his god. As much as he hated you, and in spite of the fact that Bellham was his superior, his unswerving fealty to the god justice made him set out for Bellham."

Creegar nodded briefly. "And as I did, he must have seen the message from the Venusian smuggling captain on the *wordagraph* in Bellham's office. So when he arrived at the Bellham mansion, to find Bellham gone and the window of the study smashed, he read the second identical message to Bellham on the *wordagraph* there. Being a rather excellent bloodhound, he set out for the space port. He'd probably filled in lots of gaps by then."

Sherry broke in. "He found me in the *rockabout,* in the quite confined condition you'd left me. He dashed for the wharf landing platform in time to find you holding the entire group at bay. He had his own pistol ready when he ordered you to drop yours."

Creegar shuddered. "And if he hadn't knocked me aside, I'd probably have been caught by Bellham's fire, instead of vice versa."

Sherry nodded. "I arrived, then. Hudge had the situation well in hand. Evidence and all. It almost killed him when the Venusian captain and a dozen of his smuggling crew stepped up and took over. He was livid with rage."

CREEGAR grinned. "I can picture him. Justice being tampered with was probably enough to drive him to

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insanity." His face suddenly went sober. "But why do you suppose the Venusian captain went to the front for me?"

"He explained, Thorne; and told me to pass it on to you. In one of your bitter drinking bouts with him, you revealed everything about the frame-up that had railed you to the penal planet."

Creegar frowned. "That's right. I did blow my mental rockets to him one night."

"Well," Sherry resumed, "one of the smugglers killed in the frame-up that resulted in your banishment was the captain's younger brother. He had never known that Bellham had been responsible for that, even in the ten years he'd been working the outside mechanism of the smuggling group for Bellham. He decided immediately that Bellham would pay. That's why he double-crossed him and set you on Earth. That's why he arranged a faked blackmail scene on the wharf, just to bring Bellham there in person."

Creegar was silent. His black eyes were thoughtful.

"So the captain got his satisfaction, through your shooting of Bellham. He saw to it that he and his crew could safely get out of the space port, and then he turned Mecks and the other thugs of Bellham back into the hands of Hudge."

"Q.E.D." Creegar said softly.

"Yes, Thorne, Q.E.D.," Sherry said quietly.

Creegar found her hand.

A nurse appeared. "There is a visitor for you, Mr. Creegar."

Lee Hudge, stony faced in embarrassment, stepped out onto the solarium. He gulped, nodded. He wore a bandage on the side of his head.

Creegar grinned. "Hello, Hudge."

Hudge cleared his throat. "I just want to tell you, Creegar that I, ah," his thin voice faltered, "I, ah, hope you feel better pretty quickly."

"Thanks," Creegar said sincerely.

"Ah," Hudge looked doubtfully at Sherry. "Hell, Creegar," his face was suddenly wreathed in self-contempt, "what I really want to tell you is that I was wrong. Justice wasn't wrong. I was wrong. And, hell, I'm sorry."

Lee Hudge turned and walked rapidly out of the solarium, never looking back.

Thorne Creegar grinned up at Sherry. "Well," he said. "I'll be damned. Now I can die in peace. Nothing can climax that scene, ever!"

Sherry Bennet took his hand, smiling knowingly.

THE END.

« GREASED LIGHTNING »

THE newest animal to be trained for racing to satisfy the demands of a sport-loving nation is the cheetah. Prior to the war, cheetah racing had become quite a fad in England. The speed of the cheetah is quite unbelievable and in a short race is the swiftest of all animals. A cheetah can easily outrun a horse, greyhound, or even the swift Indian antelope if the distance is not too great.

The cheetah belongs to the cat family although their legs and body are longer and thinner than those of their "relatives." They possess long tails which makes them more graceful runners and enable them to turn very sharply. The cheetah resembles the arch-foe of the feline family, the dog, more than any other member of the family. A cheetah sits high on its haunches, dog-fashion, and their claws are only partly retractile and not very sharp.

The cheetah, when properly trained, also makes an excellent hunter and docile house pet. In fact, Indian trainers often share their beds with their "star" pupils during the training period.

Who knows but that we may soon have cheetah tracks in addition to our ever popular dog and horse tracks in America.

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FANTASTIC FACTS

By NEWELL WATSON

BLUE PLEASES GOLDFISH

DR. N. MOOKHERJI found from experimentation that goldfishes prefer the color blue. The fish used in the experiment were allowed to pick their favorite color by choosing one of four stalls into which they might swim. Each stall was lighted by a candle shining through a piece of colored glass. The number of times the goldfish entered each stall and the lengths of time they stayed were counted and a calculation made. The preferred color was blue, then came green, yellow and finally red.

* * *

WILL THE SUN EVER EXPLODE?

ONE problem that has been perplexing astronomers since ancient times is that of star explosions. Modern astronomy has yet to solve the mystery of the origin, existence and death of stars.

It is common knowledge that the sun may some day burst, bringing down to the earth. Of course, it will probably take billions of years, but when and if the sun finally explodes our world would turn into a lifeless cloud of hot gases drifting in space.

* * *

PETROLEUM FAR FROM PETTY

THE U. S. uses twice as much petroleum as drinking water. Every day enough crude oil is pumped to completely cover Manhattan Island —12 miles long, a mile wide and a foot and one-half deep.

* * *

ERADICATING BRIGHT'S DISEASE

THE third leading cause of death in the world today is Bright's disease. This malady can be completely cured if it is treated in its early stages before it becomes chronic.

Nephritis, the medical term for Bright's disease, is a serious problem because sore throats and colds are usually not considered a factor in causing it. Such infections of nose and throat only too often pass unnoticed to the kidneys and there begin their destructive work. When Bright's disease becomes chronic there is little that can be done to forestall its fatal trend. Nephritis causes more deaths than any other maladies except heart disease and cancer. Its high mortality rate can be eliminated only by attacking the disease in its early acute stages.

* * *

STERILIZED SLIPS

WHEN a woman tries on a dress in a store before deciding whether or not she will buy it she runs into danger, according to the Health Department.

The practice of trying on clothes can lead to the spreading of disease. The department warns retailers of the danger and advocates the provision of sterilized slips for try-on purposes.

* * *

BULLFROG MAKES A HOG OF HIMSELF

BULLFROGS eat more than twice their weight in less than five months. Their menu consists of ordinary insects, and also toads, salamanders and smaller frogs. Bullfrogs are not only big, they're big eaters!

* * *

CAVIAR CURE FOR RICKETS

CAVIAR may be a luxurious delicacy to the majority of people, but it is a prescribed medicine to the children of Russia.

Caviar is extremely rich in Vitamin D, the best cure for rickets. Two teaspoons of caviar daily was prescribed for one month to a group of twenty babies suffering from rickets. Seventeen of these babies were completely cured by this method. Sturgeon and carplike fish caviar were used. However, almost any type of fish eggs could be substituted as successfully since caviar of various fishes differs only slightly in composition. Caviar is indeed a welcome remedy in lieu of the hated Cod liver oil.

* * *

TRANSPLANTING HEARTS THAT LIVE

TWO physiologists recently announced their success in transplanting the heart from one animal to the body of another animal with complete success. In the cases under experiment the transplanted hearts continued to beat for 100 to 165 days and stopped only when the animal on whom the heart was attached had died.

The subjects of the experiments were the red-spotted newts, which are related to the frog and salamander families. These animals have often been the subject of surgical experimentation since they are able to withstand almost any treatment or operation. Parts of a newt can be removed and then attached to any part of his own body or transplanted to the body of another newt. The transplanted part will continue to grow. However, this was the first attempt at transplanting a heart.

The hearts were removed from newts in the first stages of development and attached to the bodies of adult animals. The new heart often remained a separate unit for a time but soon worked itself in until both hearts were working the same circulatory system. In every case under experiment, the new hearts had a different rate of beat than the older heart of the body to which it was attached. Experimentation on higher forms of animal life is now under way.

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The Son of Death

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

John Ward was being hunted like an animal—but unlike a beast, he could do more than run away!

A lance of light leaped from Ward's cigarette.

"JUST a minute, buddy," the man said, stopping and staring at John Ward.

The two men had met on the sidewalk of a busy street. John Ward had seen the stranger stop and look curiously at him, he had seen the startled look of recognition in the man's eyes.

Ward was being hunted again!

Being hunted was not a new sensation with John Ward. All his life he had known he was being hunted. Ever since he had been old enough to know anything, he had known that somewhere on earth an enemy was searching for him. He did not know the identity of this enemy. He did not know why the enemy wanted to kill him. He had never seen this enemy and he did not know how he knew this enemy existed. All he knew was that his life was being sought. Day and night, never stopping, he was being hunted. Day and night, ever since he could remember, in the back of his mind a warning voice had been whispering, "Watch out. You're being hunted."

Now the voice was whispering again. "Be alert. Be careful. He's after you!"

Ward stopped and looked at the man who had spoken. He saw an individual who would not stand out in any

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crowd. A grayish suit and a grayish hat. Everything about this man was gray, even to his eyes. He looked like a moderately successful lawyer, or possibly like a small-time business man. There was nothing outstanding about him, except his grayness.

"Were you speaking to me?" Ward said.

"Yes. Don't I know you?"

Ward shook his head. "I think not," he said. "At least, I don't know you."

The gray man's eyes searched his face. Every sense alert, Ward watched him. "Is this my enemy?" he thought. He didn't know. There was something strange about this gray man, something very strange. It was not his clothes. It was *his face*. There was no trace of any emotion on it. It was stolid, indifferent, mask-like. The mindless face of an idiot might look like this. But this man was no idiot. There was something purposeful about him, and an idiot rarely showed purpose.

"I saw a picture of you once," the man said. "It was taken four or five years ago, when you were about sixteen. You've changed a lot since then but I can still recognize you. You're John Ward."

Triumph sounded in the stranger's voice. His gray eyes lit with sudden fire.

Ward frowned. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

"It's not nonsense."

"No? It can't be anything else. I never had a picture taken in my life."

He hadn't, either. Pictures could be dangerous things.

"The picture was taken without your knowledge," the gray man said. "There is no use in trying to deny your identity. It was pure accident, my stumbling on to you here, after all the places we've looked for you. But I recognized you as soon as I saw you. You're John Ward."

"And you're either a lunatic or a fool," Ward said. "If it's any information to you, my name is William Black."

"Yes?" A little uncertainty showed in the gray man's eyes. "I could be mistaken, of course," he mumbled.

"You are mistaken," Ward said. He reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a package of cigarettes, selected one and coolly lit it. All the time he was watching the gray man's hands. "Anything else I can do for you?" he said.

"No," the man said. "No, I guess not. Are you sure your name is really William Black?"

"Hell, don't you think I know my own name?" Ward demanded.

"Yes," the gray man said hastily. "Of—of course. Sorry to have bothered you, sir. I thought you were somebody else." Bowing and apologizing, he backed away. One hand went inside his coat.

Instantly his manner changed.

"You fool!" he grated. "You should have shot first! Don't you know that in this game the stakes are mortal?"

The gray man's hand came out from under his coat. There was a gun in it, a heavy caliber, bull-dog revolver. The sunlight glinted on the sheen of blue steel.

IT WAS a busy street. People were passing on the sidewalk. Cars were swishing by on the pavement. Taxis were honking. In the next block a street car was rumbling along. Dozens of witnesses were certain to see the gray man. But in spite of that, he was going to commit murder!

Ward was standing with his back against a building. As soon as the man had stopped him, long established habits of safety had seen to it that he move until his back was protected. This process was entirely unconscious. He

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didn't have to think about it. Still smoking the cigarette, he was standing there now.

A triumphant glint in his eyes, the gray man brought up the gun.

Ward didn't try to run. That was useless. He merely pointed the cigarette at the gray man's face, pressed his fingers against the tiny white tube. An ordinary cigarette would have crumbled under the pressure. This one didn't. The lighted end exploded with a tiny *pop*. A jet of gray vapor lanced from it.

The vapor struck the gray man in the face. He dropped the gun and began to scratch at his eyes.

"I can't see!" he howled. "You've blinded me!"

"Not permanently," Ward said.

"Are—are you going to kill me?"

"No. I want you to carry a message for me."

"A m—m—message?"

"Yes. You can tell the man back of you that I know the stakes are mortal. Tell him from now on he doesn't need to hunt me any more *because I will be hunting for him.* Do you get it?"

"Y—y—yes. But there's not anybody back of me."

"The hell there isn't! Tell him I'm not running any longer. Tell him I'm coming after him."

Ward was aware that pedestrians, startled at the scene taking place before their eyes, were veering away. Curious eyes were staring at him, at the gray man, most of all at the gun lying in plain sight on the sidewalk. He turned and walked casually away. Glancing back, he saw the gray man try to run. The fellow blundered into a parked car, lost his balance and fell down. He was still scratching at his eyes.

A cop came lumbering up.

"What's going on here?"

"There was an attempted hold-up," Ward said excitedly. "I saw it all. A guy tried to stick up a pedestrian and the pedestrian smacked him down and ran. There's the hold-up artist lying in the gutter. That's his gun on the sidewalk. Arrest him, officer, before he gets away."

The gray man was trying to get to his feet again. He must have realized he was in imminent danger of being arrested. Obviously he didn't want to make any explanations to the law. Neither did John Ward.

"Get him, officer, before he escapes."

"I'll get him!" the cop grimly said. Jerking a set of handcuffs out of his pocket, he ran toward the gray man. Suppressing a smile, Ward turned and walked the other way.

TURNING the corner, he strolled casually around the block. He made a complete circuit and entered the building in front of which the gray man had tried to kill him. A curious crowd had gathered and a siren was whining in the street as a squad car drove up. The gray man, his hands in iron bracelets, was vigorously shouting that *he* was the victim of a holdup and would the dumb cops please catch the guy who pulled a gun on him, then squirted tear gas in his eyes. He sounded very unhappy and very convincing. The cops were looking bewildered. Ward grinned. The gray man would probably be able to explain his way out the mess but it would take time and Ward wanted to be uninterrupted during the next two hours.

Ward entered the building and walked up to the third floor. There was an elevator but he preferred not to use it. Nothing had changed here on this third floor. It was still as he had remembered it, including the name

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on the door. The name was

JAMES SIMPSON
Attorney at Law

He opened the door and found himself in the deluxe reception room of a suite of swank offices. There were venetian blinds on the windows, thick rugs on the floor. The receptionist's desk was made of mahogany and was ornamented with a bowl of roses. The receptionist herself had pushed one of the blinds aside and was leaning out the window, revealing a nice pair of legs as she did so.

"Lot of excitement outside," Ward said. "I caught a glimpse of it as I came in. What's going on out there?"

The girl jumped, then blushed when she discovered she had been revealing her legs.

"There was a hold-up, or something," she said. Then she became stiff and formal. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to see Mr. Simpson."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No."

"Then I am afraid Mr. Simpson can't see you. He is a very busy man—"

"I think he'll see me all right. Tell him John Ward is here."

CHAPTER II

The Lawyer's Story

"WHAT the devil happened to you?" the bewildered attorney demanded. "I was just ready to enter you in college when you disappeared."

"I was sorry to miss college," Ward said. "I tried to educate myself, and I think possibly I managed to do a fair job of it, from books and correspondence courses. Not like the real thing, of course, but it was the best I could do."

The attorney was an elderly man, with white hair and a lined, benevolent, face. He was looking bewildered now. "But where did you go?" he said.

Ward shrugged. "First stop, Australia. I shipped on a tramp steamer as a mess boy, jumped ship in Sydney, knocked around there for six months. The next hop was to South Africa. I stayed there a year. After that, Brazil, Panama, Texas. I spent the last year in New York, returning to Los Angeles only this morning."

The attorney blinked. Ulysses had not sailed a tenth as far as had John Ward. And the marks of his travels showed in the tanned brown of his lean face, in the alertness of his eyes, in the sureness of his bearing. As a skinny kid, Ward had run away. Now after five years he had returned, a man.

"But why did you run away in the first place?" the puzzled lawyer asked.

"They were getting a little too close to me."

"They were getting too close to you? What are you talking about? Who are *they?*"

"The killers."

"The—"

"The hunters," Ward supplied. "The men who were trying to kill me. They were getting a little too hot. I had to hide, if I wanted to keep on living."

"You—" Amazement in his eyes, the lawyer stared at the man sitting across the desk from him. Ward had spoken calmly. The matter of fact tone of his voice, even more than what he said, startled the attorney, made him wonder if this hard, bronzed young man sitting across from him was insane.

"Somebody was trying to kill you?" Simpson said, when he had found enough breath to speak. "You thought your life was in danger?"

"Hell, I know it was in danger. Oh,

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they were being clever about it. They were trying to kill me by accident. I would go for a ride on my bicycle. A car would almost run me down. I would go for a walk along the street. A brick would fall off a building. After three or four of these fake accidents where I barely managed to escape by the skin of my teeth, I got the idea. The only thing for me to do was to take air. I took air, and I didn't leave a forwarding address."

"But—"

"Somehow they managed to pick up my trail. How they located me in Sydney, I don't know. Maybe they located the freighter I had shipped on and some of the crew told them I had jumped ship in Sydney. Anyhow they found me. This time they didn't bother to try an accident. I was living in a cheap hotel. They took a shot at me from an adjoining building, while I was reading in bed, and blew the book out of my hands. So," Ward grinned wryly. "I left Sydney."

"But—but this is preposterous!" the lawyer gasped. "It's incredible. It's impossible. Do you realize what you are saying? Do you mean to tell me that you have been hunted over almost the entire surface of the earth?"

Ward nodded. "That's about the size of it," he said.

A BAFFLED look appeared on Simpson's face. "I—I scarcely know what to say," he stuttered. "I can't bring myself to believe this wild tale. I—"

"You think I'm nuts," Ward said quietly.

"N—no. That is—"

"You don't have to be evasive. I don't blame you for thinking I have a screw loose somewhere. A lot of times I have thought so myself. But—did you hear that siren in the street outside your office a few minutes ago?"

"Yes. But what's that got to do with this?"

"It's got this to do with it," Ward said. "That siren was on a squad car coming to pick up a man who had tried to kill me, and failed!" He told the story of the gray man, and what the gray man had said, and what the gray man had tried to do.

As the lawyer listened, the baffled look on his face grew more baffled. He looked like a man the foundations of whose faith have been rocked to the bottom. He lived in a world of law and order, where everything was cut and dried, where every action was determined by precedent. It was with the greatest difficulty that he could conceive of a situation that violated every human law. He had no knowledge of the dark and sinister forces that now and again seem to operate on earth, and little wish to know of them. When Ward had finished speaking, he wiped his face with a fine linen handkerchief, and restored it to his breast pocket.

"But why," he whispered. "Why on earth should anyone want to kill you? What meaning is hidden behind these attempts to kill you?"

"That," said Ward, "is why I came to you. You were, and I presume you still are, my guardian."

"Yes. My guardianship does not lapse until you are 21."

"I am 21 today. I do not know who my parents were. Nor do I know who I am. I have no knowledge of my real identity. But inasmuch as these attempts to kill me must have their roots in my past, I have come to you. You are my guardian. If anyone can tell me who I am, and can help me find the man who is hunting me, you can do it. That is why I came to you, Mr. Simpson."

For several minutes the attorney

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stared without speaking at the man sitting across the desk from him. He swallowed once or twice. He noticed that Ward had taken a cigarette from his pocket and without lighting it, had placed it between his lips. He cleared his throat and pressed the buzzer on his desk. When the receptionist answered his ring, he said,

"Bring me the file in the case of John Ward."

WHEN the girl had left, Ward leaned back in his chair. He could feel the throbbing of the vein in his temple. This was the only sign which indicated how much this moment meant to him.

For years he had dreamed of this hour. For years he had been hunted by secret, invisible enemies that had struck at him out of hiding. Only the sharpness of his wits, only the voice in the back of his mind constantly whispering, "Be alert. You're being hunted. He's after you!" had kept him alive. Because of these circumstances, his mind had been sharpened and his body had been forged into a hard, keen instrument fit to do his will. Where other boys had been mothered through college, their life made easy for them, he had been forced to stand against the world, and in the process he had been made fit to stand against anything. At 21, John Ward was a better man than most men can ever hope to be.

Now, with pounding heart, he was waiting for the girl to return with the file.

The file was his only link with his unknown identity, and since the enemies hunting him could only have come out of his past, the file was his only hope of discovering who his enemies were. For years he had run from them, trying to find some hiding place where he might be safe. Always they had hunted him out. Now he had stopped running. Now he was turning to fight.

The girl returned. She was empty handed. She looked perplexed. "I'm sorry, sir," she said to the lawyer. "I can't find a file on John Ward."

"It's in the vault, where all important documents are kept. Did you look in the vault?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you didn't find it?"

"No sir." It isn't there. I looked very carefully."

"But it *has* to be there," the lawyer insisted. He got to his feet. "I'll go get it myself," he said.

Ward watched him leave the room. He was conscious of a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. The feeling grew stronger when the lawyer returned.

"I—I don't understand it," the lawyer was muttering. "That vault is supposed to be burglar-proof. I am the only person who has the combination. I unlock it every morning and lock it every evening. To the best of my knowledge, it has never been tampered with. But—".

"The records in my case are gone?" Ward quietly asked.

"Damn it, yes!" the lawyer shouted. He looked more bewildered than ever.

"I'm not too surprized."

THE tone of his voice rather than the words he used focused the lawyer's attention on him. Simpson's face turned purple. "Damn it, sir!" he shouted. "Are you suggesting that I am deliberately withholding information?" Then the lawyer's voice changed again. "I'm sorry, my boy," he apologized. "Under the circumstances, I would not blame you too much if you were suspicious of me. But I can give you my word of honor that

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I have no knowledge of what happened to the records in your case."

"I believe you," Ward said. He had had experience in judging men. Unless he was badly mistaken, this attorney was honest. "I suspect the records were stolen, to make certain they would not fall into my hands."

"But my vaults are burglar-proof."

"I know the men who are seeking me are killers. I see no reason to believe they are not burglars also. Since they located me here in Los Angeles five years ago, they must also have located you. What would be more logical for them to do than to remove my records from your files?"

"But why should they do that?" the lawyer protested.

"I don't know," Ward said. "But possibly those records contained information that they thought was dangerous to them, information about my identity that they didn't want to get into my hands."

"Then they wasted their time!" the lawyer snorted. "There was no information of any conceivable importance about you in those files."

"There wasn't?" Ward questioned. "You mean you don't know anything about me, that you don't know who I am?"

"That's exactly what I mean," the attorney said. "I don't know who you are. I have never known."

"What?" Ward gasped. "But you're my guardian! If anybody knows who I am, you must."

"I'm your guardian all right, but I was appointed by the court to serve in that capacity. As to any information about you, I can give you from memory all the information I have, or have ever had, about you."

"Then go ahead," Ward said eagerly.

The attorney leaned back in his chair and crossed his hands in front of his vest. A meditative, judicial look appeared on his face. For the first time since John Ward had entered his office, the lawyer felt he was on familiar ground.

"This is June 5, 1945," he said musingly. "On June 5, 1925—twenty years ago today—the Los Angeles police received an anonymous telephone call directing them to go to a vacant house on Avalon Boulevard, where they would find an abandoned baby. The police, investigating this mysterious call, went to the address given to them. There they found a child asleep in an ordinary basket. You were this child."

The attorney paused. Ward leaned forward.

"With the child was a note," the lawyer continued. "The note was addressed to the police department. Its contents were simple, a few brief lines on a sheet of cheap paper. 'I regret the necessity that compels me to take this drastic action but circumstances beyond my control leave me no alternative. The child's name is John Ward. He is one year old today. I request that he be carefully and completely educated and funds are provided for that purpose.'"

The lawyer's dry voice went into silence.

"WAS—was that all?" Ward said.

"Except for the fact that the pillow on which you were so blissfully sleeping was made of a roll of currency totaling twenty thousand dollars, that was all," the lawyer said. "The note was unsigned, there was nothing to indicate your relationship to the writer, there was nothing to show why you were abandoned. Because of the money, which was obviously intended to provide for your maintenance and education, the case received considerable newspaper publicity. Incidentally,

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it is possible, in view of what you have told me, that these newspaper stories provided the means by which you were later located by those who were seeking to destroy you. This, however, is conjecture.

"Naturally, under such circumstances, you became a ward of the court, and I was appointed your guardian by the court. I placed you in a foster home, and, until you vanished, provided for your support and education, using the funds left with you for that purpose. Incidentally, about eight thousand dollars remain unspent of the original twenty thousand. Inasmuch as you have now reached your majority, I shall be glad to turn this sum over to you at your convenience."

"Thank you," Ward said. "I can use the money but I am not greatly interested in it. But—" For the first time, a trace of desperation showed on his brown face, "is that all you know about me? Isn't there something else you can tell me?"

The answer to this question was of tremendous importance to John Ward. Only he knew how important it really was. There is a hunger in every human being to belong somewhere, to fit some place. Not knowing who he was, Ward had never been able to feel he belonged anywhere. His life had been made purposeless by this fact. Always he had felt at loose ends.

If he could learn who he was, his life would come into focus, would achieve meaning. If he could learn the secret of the hidden forces that had unquestionably been set in motion before he was born, he would know where to find his enemies, where to strike at them. Without this knowledge he was like a man lost in the dark who is beset by hidden enemies that strike at him out of nowhere, out of nothingness. He *had* to know who he was, he *had* to know the secrets hidden away from him.

"Can't you tell me more than this?" he whispered.

The lawyer shook his head. There was compassion on his face, and a trace of bewildered fear. "I'm sorry," he said. "I have given you all the facts in my possession. Naturally, considering the circumstances under which you were found, the police attempted an investigation. It came to nothing. They picked up no clue about the person who had left you in the vacant house. They thought this person was a man, because it was a man's voice who called them on the phone, and because the note was written in a man's handwriting. It might have been your father. It might not have been. Nobody knows. Where he came from, where he went, and the reason he deserted you, were enigmas the police could not solve. I'm sorry, lad—"

WARD rose to his feet. "Thanks, anyhow," he said. "I want you to know that I appreciate all the things you did for me when I was a kid growing up. It isn't your fault that you know no more about me than you do. And thanks for trying to help me."

"I did no more than my duty," the lawyer answered. "I'm sorry I can't be of more help. If at any time—" The attorney stopped in midsentence. His eyes lit with a new gleam. "Wait a minute!" he said. "There is something else. I just this moment recalled it. When you were found, something else *was* found in the basket with you. It had completely slipped my mind. Just a second and I'll get it for you if—" he faltered, as he recalled what had happened to the file on John Ward. "—if it's still here."

"What is it?" Ward asked eagerly.

But the lawyer had already got to

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his feet and was bustling out of the room. A moment later he returned.

"It was there!" he said exultantly. He had a small cardboard box in his hand. Once the cover of the box had been white. Now it was yellow. The lawyer handed the box to Ward.

Inside was a note. Written in a cramped, Spencerian hand, the note said,

"To my dear son, to be given to him on the day when he is twenty-one years of age."

The note was unsigned.

Under it was—

"It's a watch!" Ward said. Disappointment and pleasure were mingled in the tone of his voice, disappointment, because he had hoped for information, pleasure, because somebody had thought enough of him to remember him with a present on the day when he became of age.

It was an odd watch, he saw as he examined it. Old style. But it was at least twenty years old and back in those days stream-lining had not been discovered. A thick case, made of some metal that was not gold. It was a wrist watch, with a heavy metal band attached to it.

Ward wound it, slipped it on his wrist.

"Thanks," he smiled at the lawyer. "Thanks for—"

The words faltered into silence. The smile vanished from his face. Sudden, startled fear came into his eyes. Involuntarily his mouth dropped open.

The lawyer saw the change come over him. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"N—nothing. I'm—I'm all right."

Ward's face was turning white.

"But there is something wrong," the lawyer insisted. "Are you ill? Do you want me to call a doctor?"

Ward's voice was a whisper. "I'm all right," he said. "But—*the watch is talking to me!*"

"The watch is talking—" The surprize on the lawyer's face gave way to dismay. "Are you—are you insane? Watches don't talk!"

"This one does!" Ward said grimly. He saw the dismay on the lawyer's face, knew what he was thinking. With an effort of will, the bronzed youth gained control of himself. He turned and started toward the door. Without thinking, he knew what he had to do.

"Wait a minute," the lawyer shouted. "Where are you going?"

"Away," Ward answered. "If I stick around here, you will have me clapped in the booby hatch."

The door slammed behind him.

The incredulous lawyer followed him into the reception room and tried to detain him.

"Sorry," said Ward. "I have to go. Don't try to stop me. I know what I'm doing. For the first time in my life, I really know what I am doing."

"But how did you find out what to do?" the lawyer husked.

"The watch is telling me," Ward answered. He slammed the outer door behind him, leaving a bewildered attorney and his equally bewildered receptionist gasping at each other in the office he had quitted.

IN the hall outside, Ward stopped, put his back to the wall, and leaned against it. He had regained control of himself now. For a moment, he had been startled, but the first shock of surprize had passed.

All his life a voice had whispered to him. "Watch out. Be on the alert. He's after you."

The voice had seemed to come from somewhere deep within his mind. He had long since given up attempting to discover its source. It had become a part of him, something that he had

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taken for granted.

It had never told him anything except to be on the alert, to watch out, to be careful.

The instant he had put the wrist watch on his arm, the voice had started speaking to him again. It was no longer telling him to be on the alert. It was talking directly to him, telling him what to do.

"John Ward," the voice was saying, *"the hour has come. You are now of age, you are now old enough to take up the task that has been set for you. Go at once to the Big Cypress Swamp in the Evergades of Florida. Go to the Knoll of the Three Pines. There you will receive information, and instruction. Go at once. Be on the alert. There is danger ahead of you. Take every precaution. But go at once."*

The mysterious voice whispered into silence.

John Ward blinked. He looked appreciatively down at the wrist watch on his arm.

"And I thought *I* knew something about gadgets!" he said. "But I never thought of a gadget like *this!*"

He did know something about gadgets. The cigarette that had hurled tear gas into the eyes of the gray man, blinding him, had been a clever gadget. Ward had put in many an hour of hard work perfecting the cigarette trick. But the cigarette was nothing compared to this watch that after twenty years could faithfully deliver a message entrusted to it!

"Must be some kind of radio," he thought, dismissing it from his mind.

He had no time to waste thinking about the watch, and how it operated. He had something to do. It seemed to him that without his conscious direction all his life had been spent in preparing to do the job that was before him.

CHAPTER III

The Secret of the Swamp

"MISTER, you mean you're going into Big Cypress?" the lanky Florida native said.

John Ward nodded. A four-motored sub-stratosphere transport plane had brought him from Los Angeles to Miami. A chartered plane had brought him to this small village on the west coast of Florida. "Certainly I'm going into Big Cypress Swamp," he said. "That's why I came to you. I want to rent a boat."

The native wore ragged, dirty overalls. A growth of tobacco-stained whiskers covered his face. Looking at the ground, he said, "Sorry, mister, but I ain't got any boats to rent."

"You haven't?" Ward said. Suspended between two poles thrust into the muck at the bank of the small river that flowed sluggishly out of the swamp, was a sign. The lettering was faded but still decipherable. The sign read

BOATS FOR RENT

"Isn't that your sign?" Ward said, pointing to it.

"Yep, I guess so," the man hesitantly admitted.

"What do you mean, 'You guess so?' Is it your sign or isn't it?"

"Yep, it's mine all right."

"Aren't those your boats?" Ward continued, pointing to several flat-bottomed rowboats and two canoes drawn up on the bank of the river.

The man in overalls was a fair sample of Georgia cracker, with all the stubborn, wilful contrariness that the cracker so often displays. It was obvious that he didn't want to talk, probably for no reason other than contrariness. He spat tobacco juice at a beetle

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on the ground and did not answer.

"I asked you if you owned those boats?" Ward said.

At the tone of his voice, the native squirmed. "Yep, they're my boats," he reluctantly admitted.

"All right," Ward said. "I want to rent a canoe."

"To go into Big Cypress?"

"Certainly."

"Sorry, mister," the native said. "None of my canoes are for rent, if the feller that rents 'em is going into Big Cypress."

"Why not?" Ward challenged.

"If I rent my boats, I want 'em back," the boatman answered.

"You will get it back," Ward said impatiently.

The boatman shook his head. "The chances are I won't get it back, mister, not if the man who rents it is going into that swamp!"

"Do you think I'm going to steal it?" Ward said.

"I ain't saying anything like that, mister," the boatman answered.

"What are you hinting at?" Ward demanded. "Are you trying to tell me I'll be killed if I go into the swamp?"

THE boatman didn't answer. Ward plied him with questions. The man squirmed and twisted but he wouldn't talk. From his evasive answers, Ward gathered that he was scared of the swamp.

"What are you scared of?" Ward demanded.

"I ain't scared, I don't know nuthin', and I ain't talkin'," the boatman sullenly answered. "My boats just ain't for rent, that's all."

"All right," Ward said. "I'll *buy* one of them. How much do you want for one of those canoes? Or are you afraid to sell?"

The boatman was not afraid to sell. Ward had in his pocket a good chunk of the eight thousand dollars he had received from the lawyer before leaving Los Angeles. He didn't in the least mind spending money. Money wasn't important.

Reaching the Knoll of the Three Pines was important.

The boatman helped Ward stow his equipment in the canoe.

"You got any relatives or anybody you want notified if you don't come back?" the boatman asked, as Ward shoved the canoe out into the river.

"No," Ward answered. He dug the paddle into the water and sent the canoe up the river. If he didn't return, or if his body floated back down the sluggish stream, there was no one to be notified.

The Knoll of the Three Pines was just exactly what its name said it was, a sandy knoll rising above the muck of the Florida Everglades. Three huge pine trees stood on top of the knoll. Stretching away for miles in every direction, was nothing but swamp, an almost impenetrable tangle of saw-edged grass growing out of black muck. No roads ran into his region, no trails crossed it. The only method of travel was by boat. It was a true jungle, one of the few jungle areas still existing in North America, and it was so remote, so hard to enter, so dangerous, that the only inhabitants, aside from the far too numerous alligators and deadly cotton mouth moccasins, were a few hardy Seminole Indians, who still managed to survive in this fastness.*

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* The Everglades region of Florida, according to one scientist, is one of the few places on earth today where coal beds are in the process of formation. Thus these vast tide-water swamps must to some extent duplicate the great swamps that must have existed on earth millions of years ago when our present supply of coal was laid down.—Ed.

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John Ward reached the Knoll of the Three Pines late in the afternoon. He had paddled for miles, forcing his canoe through stagnant sloughs over-grown with water plants, along narrow passages where black water marked the only passable trail. In Miami he had consulted detailed maps of this region and from them had learned the location of the place he was seeking. But of far more help to him than the maps had been the fact that he seemed to recognize this region as soon as he entered it. When he had been in doubt as to a turning, a voice in the back of his mind had whispered, "This way."

IT was the same voice that had whispered to him all his life.

It was whispering to him now.

"Be on the alert. Be ready. He's after you."

He sat in the canoe studying the knoll. In reality it was a small island rising in the midst of a swamp. Covered with a growth of scrub pine, it rose a few feet above the water level.

"If I were hunting for a place to hide," he thought. "This would be the kind of a place I would choose."

His eyes searched the island. There was no sign of human life, no indications that men had ever been here. What if humans had never been here? The implications of the question were stunning. For the first time in his life he realized he did not know whether or not the enemy he was seeking was human! True, men had tried to kill him, but they might have been tools of a master that was not human!

As he shoved the canoe toward the shore, a heavy splash came from somewhere in the swamp. A startled blue crane squawked into the air and flapped away. The splash did not come again. He reached the canoe, drew it well up on the sandy bank, then, as silently as a shadow, slid into the growth of scrub pines.

Not fifty yards from the shore, in a little clearing, he found signs that humans had once been here. Stubs that had once been the foundations of a house protruded from the ground. Judging from the extent of the foundation, it had been a rambling structure of several rooms.

It had been burned to the ground.

The burning had taken place many years in the past. Small pine trees were growing where the house had once stood.

The whole clearing had been dug full of deep holes. Covered with briars and weeds now, the pits were still plainly visible. Not a foot of ground had remained unexcavated. The depressions were even visible between the burned poles that marked the foundations of the house.

"Whee!" Ward whistled. "Who dug all those holes?"

Once, on the Gulf of Mexico near Galveston, he had seen a place where treasure hunters had dug for a hoard of gold and jewels reputedly buried there by the pirate, Jean La Fitte. That place had looked like this.

Had treasure seekers been digging here on this island in the Florida Everglades? If so, what had they been seeking?

Ward searched the place carefully, seeking some clue that might reveal what had happened here. He began to find things, bits of broken glass, small pieces of corroded metal, pieces of broken pottery. There was a tremendous amount of the stuff. He found one thing that particularly interested him. Burned and twisted, it had obviously been a delicate chemical balance, a set of those super-sensitive scales that chemists use to measure microscopic amounts of various chem-

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icals. He also found a broken test tube.

"A laboratory," he thought. "This place was once a laboratory."

The broken test tube, the chemist's balance, the other odds and ends, all pointed to the conclusion that somebody, at some time in the past, had set up a laboratory here on the Knoll of the Three Pines.

But who? And why? And when? And what part did this burned laboratory play in the mysterious past of John Ward?

"I should find more than this," he thought. "There should be more here than rubbish."

HE glanced at the watch the lawyer had given him. He was still wearing it. The mysterious voice that had spoken when first he put the watch on his wrist had not spoken again. Nor did it speak now.

He rose to his feet and prepared to make a complete search of the knoll. The sun, low in the west, was sinking behind a bank of thunder heads. A wind was beginning to moan through the pines. A storm was coming.

Overhead, at the top of the knoll, the three huge pines beckoned to him. He climbed the knoll.

The three large pines formed a triangle on top of the knoll. In the triangle was a granite marker that looked like a tombstone. Carved in the granite were the words

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
RICHARD AND ELIZABETH
WARD

For a long time John Ward stood without moving. There was a numbness in his mind. Again and again he read the words carved in the granite, but his mind refused to seek for the meaning that must be back of them.

He did not know what he had expected to find here, but it had not been a grave. Intuitively he knew he had been brought here for some purpose. What purpose could reach beyond the grave?

As he stood there, the sun plunged behind the bank of western clouds and the wind began to moan louder through the pines. Twilight was at hand. Fast falling tropic night was not far away.

Dimly he began to realize that a voice, *the* voice, was whispering again in his mind.

"Lay the watch in the circle on top of the stone."

A spider with feet of ice went walking up Ward's spine.

"Lay the watch in the circle on top of the stone."

The voice that had been in the back of his mind all his life, warning him, watching over him, was telling him what to do! Because the voice had been a part of him all his life, he had never questioned its origin. He had grown so accustomed to it that he had never thought of challenging its commands.

He did not challenge it now. Old habits of obedience were too well established for that, but cold winds were playing over his body as he stepped forward and looked at the top of the tombstone.

A circle, forming the letter O, had been carved in the granite.

He laid the watch in the circle. Leaping back, he crouched against one of the pines.

"All right," he thought. "What it is that is going to happen, let it happen!"

He was expecting anything to happen. If the earth opened up and a monster with horns leaped from the ground, he would not be too surprized. There were strong elements of witchcraft in this situation. He had the impression he was playing with forces

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that were more than human. Trying to still the fevered beating of his heart, he crouched with his back to the trunk of the pine. The moaning wind went by overhead. In the distance a flash of lightning fingered against the black cloud moving through the sky.

THERE was a soft, muffled click. The opening of the latch on a door would make such a sound. It was followed by a thin screech like the turning of a door on a rusty hinge. That was all.

Ward waited.

The sounds did not come again.

Whatever it was that was going to happen, had happened. He couldn't see what it was. Heavy twilight had fallen. Then, straining his eyes, he saw it.

Something had projected itself from the top of the stone. A slim cylinder three feet in length had suddenly thrust upward there. Approaching, he saw what it was.

The circle carved on the top of the stone had been a plug closing an opening that led downward.

"Something was hidden in the stone!" he gasped. "There is—must be—a spring down in there, with a trigger to release it. The watch released the trigger. Somebody—somebody went to a lot of trouble to hide something where it would never be found!"

The object that had been projected from the granite was a cylinder made of a sheet of soft lead. The edges, the top and the bottom, had been soldered shut, apparently in an effort to make it waterproof. Using a pocket knife, Ward cut the lead away.

A roll of paper fell into his hands. It was a manuscript made up of many pages of yellowed paper rolled into a cylinder. With trembling fingers, Ward pulled a flashlight out of his pocket. Written in a cramped hand on the first page were the words

"To John Ward and Patricia Holm, an explanation of their strange destiny."

His heart leaped as he read the words. Here, at last, was an explanation of the strange things that had happened to him. Here was the secret of his past. Eagerly he flipped the pages and started to read.

"Drop that manuscript and get your hands up."

He jerked his eyes away from the yellowed pages and looked straight into the beam of a flashlight and into the muzzle of a gun.

CHAPTER IV

The Thing in the Night

THE hand that held the gun did not waver. Ward could not see its owner but he could see the hand itself. Small and delicate, with well-kept nails, it was the hand of a girl.

Ward would have doubted the presence of anyone in this pestilential swamp. He had seen no one on the knoll and he had found no reason to believe that anyone was here. Now to find himself looking into the muzzle of a gun held by a girl was incredible.

He did not drop the manuscript.

The fingers circling the butt of the gun whitened.

"You'll shoot!" Ward involuntarily gasped. There was no mistaking the meaning of the whitening of those fingers.

"You darned right I'll shoot!" a girl's voice said. "If you don't drop that manuscript and get your hands up within ten seconds, you'll be a dead man."

He dropped the manuscript and jerked his hands into the air. He had

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no choice except to obey. Inwardly he was cursing himself. He had been so interested in reading the manuscript that he had forgotten to be on the alert. It was one of the few times in his life that this had happened.

"Turn around," the girl ordered.

"But—"

"I said to turn around!" she snapped.

"Nuts, Patricia Holm," he answered. "I'm not going to turn around and you're not going to shoot either."

"How did you know my name?" the girl gasped. Startled surprise was in her voice. For a second, the muzzle of the gun wavered. Ward brought his palm down edge first, striking at the gun. He was fast. Surprise was on his side.

But if he was fast, she was faster. The gun was jerked back out of his reach. He found himself looking again into its muzzle.

"Try that again and I'll blow a hole in you," the girl said.

Ward grimaced. He had been too hasty. He really hadn't had a chance to succeed. Only in western stories did the hero knock the gun out of the hand of his enemy.

"Wait a minute, Patricia," he said. "I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. You startled me."

"I'll say you shouldn't have done it," she answered. "Turn around."

"Listen, Patricia Holm," he said. "I'm John Ward."

"I don't know how you know my name," she said. "But I can't see that it makes any difference. As for you being John Ward, so what? I never heard the name before."

"And I had never heard of Patricia Holm until I looked at the front page of that manuscript!" Ward blazed. "Don't you understand? That manuscript is addressed to John Ward and Patricia Holm, and I'm John Ward."

For an instant the girl hesitated. "Is that manuscript really addressed to me?" she asked at last.

"To both of us," Ward answered.

"But how do you come into this situation?"

"Probably the same way you do," Ward answered grimly.

"But that's impossible. I don't believe it."

"Then look for yourself."

"All right," the girl assented. "But you back away and keep your hands up. If this is a trick, you might be interested to know that what I shoot at, I usually hit."

"This is no trick," Ward said, backing away. His mind in a turmoil, he watched her warily bend over and pick up the bundle of yellowed papers.

WHO was this girl? When he had called her Patricia Holm he had been stabbing in the dark. He had been guessing. It had seemed to be a good guess. The instant he had learned that there was a girl linked with him in this incredible adventure, it had seemed logical to assume that she would also come here. But he had not thought she was already here.

What part did she play in the chain of events that had brought him here? Had she also been hunted across the earth?

She looked up from the manuscript. "This is addressed to me all right," she hesitantly said. "And to John Ward."

"I am he."

"You are? Prove it?"

"Prove it?" Ward echoed.

"After all, you can scarcely expect me to take your word."

"Isn't the fact that I am here enough proof?" he demanded.

"Not for me," she cooly answered.

"If you are going to take that attitude, I must remember that I have no

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proof that you are really Patricia Holm —*Look out! There is something back of you!*"

In the darkness Ward had caught a glimpse of a movement directly behind the girl. He shouted a warning at her. She gave no sign that she had even heard it.

"Do you think I will fall for an old trick like that?" she asked.

"It's no trick. There is— Look out, girl, there *is* something back there. I saw it again."

He started forward, and found the muzzle of the pistol centered on his heart. It brought him to a halt.

"I gather I am supposed to turn around and look behind me, giving you a chance—Eeeeeee!" Her scream split the night.

A hand and an arm came down across her shoulder. It ignored the gun and the flashlight and reached instead for the manuscript which she had tucked under her arm.

"I take," a guttural voice muttered.

The manuscript was snatched from her grasp. She jerked herself away, began firing blindly. Ward had not clearly seen the thing that had attacked her. It was too dark for that. All he had glimpsed was a dark bulk moving behind the girl but he had seen the arm that came down and snatched the manuscript. The arm had been long and heavy. It had been covered with heavy reddish fur.

Ward had been forced to lay his own flashlight on the ground. The girl had dropped hers. Holstered under his left armpit was a pistol, but without light it was useless. Dropping to his knees he began to feel for one of the lights. Shrubs were cracking as a heavy body ran down the hill. The girl was still shooting blindly. Ward found a light, sent its beam down the side of the knoll. He caught a glimpse of something that looked like a gorilla. It vanished among the scrub pines.

"What—what was that thing?" the girl gasped in a frightened voice.

"I don't know. Are you hurt?"

"No. It barely touched me. Did—did it get the manuscript?"

"Yes."

WARD did not add that if she had not been so suspicious, his warning might have enabled her to save the precious roll of paper. He started running down the slope.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to get that manuscript," he answered, plunging down the side of the knoll. She called to him but he did not hesitate. A few minutes later, when he paused to search the ground for the trail of the beast that had come out of the night, she caught up with him.

"Let me go with you," she panted.

"Why?"

"Because—because that manuscript means a lot to me too. If you are really John Ward you will know how much it means. I'm sorry I didn't believe you when you tried to warn me but I was afraid you were tricking me."

"And you're not afraid of it now?"

"No. When that thing attacked me, you could have shot me. You didn't. You tried to help me. I don't know who you are or where you came from, John Ward, but I think you are my friend, the first one I ever had. And somehow, although I don't know how, I think we are both mixed up in this business together."

Her voice was low and tense. There was still fear in it but the frightened panic had gone. There was a new note in it too, a soft, pulsing eagerness that Ward had never heard before and could not define.

"Come on," he said. "We're in this together."

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He had accepted her. Her story could wait until later. The important task now was to find the creature—beast, devil, demon—that had stolen the all-important roll of paper.

That the task was almost hopeless, he knew before he started. Their only chance was to follow the tracks. And—he didn't like the looks of those tracks. They were big, at least a foot long, and while they were roughly human in shape, they showed the marks of claws.

"What—what could leave prints like this behind it?" the girl asked.

"I don't know," Ward answered bitterly. How many more questions would he have to answer with that unsatisfying phrase? He was sick of not knowing, of being always in the dark, of trying to elude an enemy that came from nowhere. He wanted to know what he was fighting.

The tracks led through the growth of scrub pines straight to the edge of the swamp. A lagoon of dark water, its surface ruffled by the constantly rising wind, lay before them. The tracks waded into the water, went out of sight.

"We haven't a chance," Ward groaned. "That thing can hide in this swamp forever."

GRIMLY he led the way back to the top of the knoll. He wanted to talk to this girl. She had come here. Obviously she must know something.

"What do you want me to tell you about myself?" she asked, in response to his question.

"Everything," he said. "Your whole life history."

"Well," she began, "I was raised in an orphanage—"

"I might have known it!" Ward interrupted. "And you don't know who your parents were or anything about yourself. You were found in a basket on a doorstep, the only way you know your name is because there was a note that said you were Patricia Holm, a sum of money was left with you to provide for your education, and all your life a voice has been whispering to you, 'Be on the alert. He's after you.' A few weeks ago you became of age and you received a watch—"

"It was a ring," the girl interrupted. "But all the rest is true. How in the world did you know all these things about me?"

"Because the same thing happened to me!" Ward said. Briefly he told her what he knew of himself, then listened to what she had to say about herself. Her story duplicated his, with the exception that, as an infant, she had been left in New York instead of in Los Angeles.

"What does it all mean, John Ward?" she whispered.

"It means that we were hidden away. Tell me: have you been hunted all your life, have you had to hide?"

"No," she answered. "I have heard the same voice that you tell about and I've had the sensation that I was being hunted, but no one tried to kill me."

"Then they didn't find you," Ward said. "They found me, but missed you."

"But why were we hidden for so long? And why didn't the persons who hid us just leave a message for us? Why wasn't the manuscript simply left with our guardians?"

"I think I can answer that," Ward said. "No manuscript was left with our guardians because the persons who hid us doubted that such a message would ever reach us. And it wouldn't either. If any manuscript had been left with my guardian, it would never have got to me." He told her how the lawyer's vault had been burglarized. "Simpson's whole file on me had been taken. If the manuscript had been in

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that file, I would never have seen it."

"Who are we, John Ward?" Her voice was tremulous. "What are we?"

"The manuscript would have told us," he answered. "Incidentally those holes I discovered here on the knoll may have been made by someone who suspected the manuscript was buried here and was searching for it. Did you see the holes?"

"No. I have just arrived and had concealed my canoe when I saw you coming. After that, I was trying to keep out of sight and shadow you at the same time. I didn't see any holes."

"The whole knoll has been dug full of them, especially around the place where the building once stood. I think there is little doubt that somebody searched this knoll very carefully, looking for that manuscript, and didn't find it, because it had been too cleverly hidden."

Little by little a picture was building up in his mind. It was vague and shadowy as yet, but he was beginning to get glimpses of the operation of some vast scheme in which he and this girl played central parts. He felt a little like an actor in a play, but unlike an actor, he did not know his part, he did not know his lines, nor his entrance cues. Obviously the play had been written before he was born, before Patricia Holm was born. They had been hidden away and clues had been left for them to enable them to learn the parts they were to play. The clues led here, to a roll of manuscript hidden away in what looked like a tombstone. But before they had a chance to learn their lines, the manuscript had been taken.

"WHAT *was* that thing?" Patricia Holm asked.

"It spoke English, saying 'I take' when it grabbed the manuscript. Therefore it ought to be human. But if it wore clothes, I didn't see them. It didn't wear shoes and its tracks looked like it had claws. Therefore it ought to be a beast. Anything I say about it will be only a guess. Maybe it's both human and beast, which leaves only the questions of where it came from and what it was doing here."

"Do you think it dug the holes you found? Do you think it was searching for the manuscript?"

"I don't know. But it certainly ignored everything else and grabbed the manuscript. For all I know—" Ward shivered "—it may be our enemy."

He didn't believe that, but he didn't know it *wasn't* true, and in spite of his cast-iron-nerves, the thought sent shivers up his spine.

"What are we going to do?"

"Wait until tomorrow and see what can be done. Meanwhile," he glanced at the sky, "There is a storm coming."

Rain was already falling, in big splattering drops driven by the wind. Thunder was crashing nearer. They sought the protection of the pines on top of the knoll. Lightning began to flash.

A particularly brilliant flash of lightning came and Ward found himself waiting for the roar of the thunder.

The thunder did not come.

Not until then did Ward realize that the lighting flash had not come and gone in the split fraction of a second, the way lightning should. Coming from the clouds overhead, it had beamed down to earth. It did not die away. It hung in the air, a finger of intense light reaching to the ground.

"That's not lightning!" the girl gasped.

"It's a searchlight," Ward said. "But don't ask me what kind of a ship big enough to carry a searchlight of that power can stay in the air in a storm like this. I won't know the answer. But

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that is a searchlight."

He knew that in spite of the tremendous stride aviation had made before the end of World War II, no nation had invented an airplane that could stay long aloft in the middle of a violent thunderstorm. But there was a plane up there in the clouds.

Illumined by a lightning flash, he caught a glimpse of the plane.

It wasn't a plane!

It was a ship something like a blimp. No motors were visible on it. It had no fins or elevators, to control it in air currents. Sleek and stream-lined, it was moving slowly through the darkness, oblivious of the storm.

"It's coming down," Patricia Holm said. "What shall we do?"

"Nothing," Ward said. "We can't run. We'll hide here and hope they won't find us."

"Do you think it's coming for *us?*" the girl persisted.

"I don't think it's here by accident!" Ward answered.

Slipping noiselessly through the night, the ship was dropping down toward the knoll.

CHAPTER V

The Impossible Fortress

THEY crouched under the pines, watching the ship.

"They'll have a hard time finding us in this storm," Patricia said. "Has it occurred to you that the people in the ship might be friends?"

"It has occurred to me that they mightn't, too," Ward answered drily. "What's going on there now?"

The ship had stopped moving. Seemingly without support it was hanging motionless in the air. The searchlight was focused on the clearing where the old laboratory had stood.

Something was moving in that clearing. The light was focused on it.

"It's the beast that grabbed the manuscript!" the girl hissed.

The creature had been jumping up and down in the clearing, apparently trying to attract the attention of the occupants of the ship.

"It must have entered the lagoon and then doubled back. Probably it has been watching us all the time. Ah! I see what it is doing!" There was grim wonder in Ward's voice as he watched the scene taking place below them.

The beast had ceased jumping up and down. Looking up at the ship, it was pointing up toward the top of the knoll. As they watched, it started up the sandy slope. The ship followed it.

"It's telling them where we're hiding!" Patricia's startled voice rang out.

"Which proves that the people in that ship are scarcely friends," Ward commented. "Where are you going?"

The girl had leaped to her feet. "I'm going to hide," she answered. "Come on."

Ward rose to his feet but he made no effort to follow her.

"Aren't you coming?"

He shook his head.

"But we have to hide. It's our only chance. If they catch us, they'll kill us."

"Use your head," he said. "We would have to hide in the swamps. People who go into these swamps on foot usually don't come out. Besides, they can follow us through the air. They can hunt us down as no animal was ever hunted. If we run now, we haven't a chance."

"Is that your only reason?" the girl blazed.

"No," Ward said quietly.

"What's the rest of it?"

"I'm tired of running. I'm sick of hiding. And I am desperately sick of not knowing what I am running from.

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So I am going out into the open and give myself up."

"But they'll kill you!"

"Maybe," he shrugged. "But if I am to fight my enemy, I have to know my enemy. Now that the manuscript is gone, the only way I can learn about my enemy is to go to him. I'm going to do just that."

THE girl was silent.

"But you don't have to go with me," Ward continued. "They may not know about you, and if they get me they may let you escape. You can hide tonight and tomorrow you can find my canoe or your boat and get out of here."

It was a reasonable suggestion. And it would give Patricia Holm a chance to keep on living.

"In the meantime, what about you?" she asked.

"I'll be all right," Ward said. "Get going now. They mustn't see you."

"You wouldn't be giving yourself up so I can escape?" she demanded.

"Partly," Ward admitted. "But that is not the important part. If you weren't here, I would do the same thing, for the same reasons. I'm tired of being hunted. I want to do a little hunting myself."

"You won't do any hunting if you're dead!"

Ward didn't answer that. "Beat it," he said. "And good luck."

"You're—you're really going out there and surrender?"

"Yes." He turned and walked down the side of the knoll.

The ship wast just above the top of the scrub pine. Below it he could hear the beast-creature fighting its way through the undergrowth. The searchlight was darting everywhere. Suddenly, as he stepped into an open space in the pines, the light caught him. The beam was blinding. He couldn't face it. He had to turn his head aside.

This was the moment that would decide his fate. If they didn't shoot him as soon as they saw him, he might, just possibly might, have a chance. He held his breath and lifted his hands.

Seconds passed while the light was focused on him. He waited for the shots. No shots came. The ship stopped moving. He had the impression he was being carefully scrutinized. He could feel his heart pounding savagely in his breast. Involuntarily his muscles tensed against the slugs he was afraid would come tearing into his body.

Would they shoot him? All over the earth they had tried to kill him. Now that he had walked into their arms would they shoot? Or would they stop to ask questions? Would the fact that he was willingly surrendering make them curious?

Abruptly the ship began to descend. It came straight down, in a way that no dirigible could ever move.

They hadn't shot him! They were going to take him prisoner!

"Well, they're going to ask questions before they shoot!" a relieved voice sighed near him.

It was Patricia Holm. Turning, he saw her standing within a few feet of him. She had followed him down the side of the knoll.

"I thought I told you to hide!" he challenged.

"You did," she answered. "But you didn't expect me to let you take all the risks while I saved my neck, did you? This is my fight too."

SMASHING the growth of pines aside, the ship came down. Trees six and eight inches in diameter were broken under its weight as easily as reeds. That fact startled Ward. He

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had thought the ship might possibly be some form of advanced dirigible. The way it smashed the pines showed it was no dirigible. It must be made out of steel and it must weigh tons.

It stopped a few feet above the ground, hung there in the air as easily as a hummingbird might hang above a flower. A door opened in the side, revealing a lighted interior. A man appeared in the door!

"You!" Ward gasped.

It was the gray man, who had tried to kill him in Los Angeles. There was no mistaking the expressionless face, the emotionless eyes. He had changed clothes and was now wearing a kind of uniform. It was gray. Behind him were other men. They were also gray. All of them were holding strange looking devices that looked like sub machine guns made out of polished aluminum and glass.

"There are two of you," the gray man said, as if this fact puzzled him. "If there had only been you, Ward, I would have known what to do. This complicates matters. I have to take both of you to the boss. Search them!" he said to the men with him. "If they make a move, blast them!"

The two captives did not attempt to resist.

"How did you get here?" Ward asked.

"Simpson phoned us," the gray man casually answered. "As soon as you turned up, he let us know you were there. We trailed you. As soon as it was obvious that you were coming here, I put in a call for the ship so we could come out here and pick you up.

"Simpson is in your employ!" Ward gasped.

"Well, yes," the gray man answered. "He has been working with us since you skipped out five years ago. We thought you would eventually come back to him. Yes, Simpson has helped us out, although he doesn't know it."

"How can he keep from knowing it?"

"We have ways and means," was the enigmatic answer.

"But—who are you? And why have you been trying to kill me. What is this all about?"

"Don't you know?" the gray man said. "Well, it's not my turn to tell you. The boss will take care of that. Now no more questions. We're going to take you along to the boss. He'll know what to do with you. Into the ship with them, men. And watch them. This guy is tricky."

As they started toward the ship the beast-creature came waddling up. Seen in full light, he looked more like a beast than a man. He wore no clothes and he looked like a gorilla. Dirty, muddy, wet with rain, he came toward them.

"I got!" he was saying. "I got!"

HE WAS holding the roll of manuscript in his hands. Like an ungainly dog bringing something to its master he came up to the gray man and handed the manuscript to him.

The gray man grabbed it, ran his eyes over it. Surprize showed on his face. "This is what the boss has been looking for!" he exulted. "Will he be glad to get this! Toro, you've done a wonderful job, finding this," he said to the half beast.

"Toro good boy," the thing said, dim traces of pride in its voice. "Toro get. Toro watch. Toro hunt. Toro find. Something for Toro?" The voice was plaintive now. It sounded like an idiot who has done a good deed and is hesitatingly waiting for a promised reward.

"Sure," the gray man said. "There will be something for you."

Without a second's hesitation, he

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brought up the strange device he carried, and pointed it at Toro. The half beast looked at it, a vague wondering smile on its face. The gray man pressed the trigger.

From the muzzle of the device there leaped a bolt of radiation. It looked like lightning. It smashed straight into the waiting face of Toro. The face vanished in a splash of red.

The huge, ungainly body fell like a sack of mud. It twitched, tried to roll over, then was still.

"Is that the way you reward your faithful servants?" Ward said.

The gray man shrugged. "His job was finished. We've had him here for years searching for this manuscript, waiting for you, if you happened to turn up. From what I've heard he has scared the natives clear out of these swamps."

"I'll say he has," Ward said, remembering the actions of the man from whom he had tried to rent a boat. "But why did you kill him?"

"Because his job was done," the gray man answered carelessly. "Because we don't need him any more."

At a wave of his hand, his men herded Ward and the girl into the ship. Patricia Holm looked sick.

"THEY'RE beasts!" the girl sobbed. "He wasn't anything but a harmless idiot. He scared me when he took the manuscript, but I didn't know what he was. And they murdered him! They're worse than beasts."

"They're kind of tough all right," Ward answered grimly.

They had been thrust into a small windowless hole that was without furniture of any kind. A tube in the ceiling shed a pale blue light over the cheerless room. Ward was listening to the whine of the mysterious motors that lifted the ship. The sensation of increased weight told him that the vessel was rising fast.

The door opened. The gray man stood there.

"I just wanted to warn you not to try to escape," he said.

"Worried about us?" Ward asked.

"The boss does our worrying for us," the gray man answered.

"Who is the boss?"

"You'll find out soon enough," was the enigmatic answer.

"Okay," Ward shrugged. He changed the subject. "This is rather an unusual ship, isn't it? How does it operate?"

"I don't know," came the reply. "All we do is fly it. It is something in the way of a ship, though. The boss invented it."

"Hmm," Ward thought. Aloud he said. "I'm surprized I haven't seen stories about it in the newspapers. I should think it would arouse a lot of curiosity."

"It would," the gray man answered, "if anybody ever saw it."

"How can you keep people from seeing it?"

"Oh, it has been seen, a few times. But nobody has ever believed the people who said they saw such a thing. We only land at night. When we're out in the daytime, we fly too high to be seen. A ship twenty to thirty miles high is invisible."

"Twenty or thirty miles?" Ward gasped. "Will it go that high?"

"Yes, and a lot higher. We're about thirty miles high right now."

"The devil we are! Would you mind telling us where we are going?"

"Headquarters," the gray man promptly answered. "Headquarters is located in Grant Land."

"Grant Land?" Ward questioned. "I never heard of it."

"Most people haven't," the gray

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man answered. "It's about eight degrees from the North Pole."

Carefully closing the door behind him, he exited. A lock clicked. John Ward and Patricia Holm stared in bewilderment at each other.

"The North Pole—" the girl whispered.

Humming with the surge of vast energies being released, the ship drove through the night.

CHAPTER VI

Thordon

HE HAD small delicate hands and a thin, pinched face. His head was completely bald, with that kind of abhorrent baldness that comes not from losing the normal head hair but from never having any hair to lose. His mouth was small and cruel; from a person with a mouth like that you would never expect kindness. He was sitting at a desk reading the manuscript. He read a whole page at a single glance.

John Ward and Patricia Holm were standing in front of him. The gray man had deferentially ushered them into this room, and after laying the manuscript on the desk in front of *him,* had tiptoed out. Other than a single glance, he had paid them no attention, but had grabbed the manuscript.

This was headquarters. They were somewhere near the north pole. The trip was over.

This was the enemy.

As soon as he saw the delicate figure seated at the desk, Ward knew he had found his enemy. At first sight, hate rose within him. It seemed to him that all his life, without knowing him, he had hated this man. Every instinct he had shouted at him to leap across the desk and throttle the man seated there. Other instincts warned him to caution. Ward was unarmed. The man across the desk *looked* unarmed. Ward waited. He did not trust appearances here. To leap across the desk looked easy. Therefore it was probably hard, if not impossible.

Ward watched him read the manuscript. He covered a whole page at a single glance. That meant a photographic eye and a mind that retained impressions. A powerful mind. He finished reading the manuscript and looked up.

"Well, well," he said. "So you are John Ward." There was contempt in the tone.

"Yes," Ward said. "Who are you?"

"I have no name!" Malevolent hatred glistened in the eyes as he made that statement. "I am the master! I am ruler. I am the king but I have more powers than any king ever had. There is no word in the language strong enough to describe what I am. So I have selected a name for myself. I am Thordon. From Thor, the old Norse god who struck his enemies with lightning and thunder. Does that satisfy you?"

Ward ignored the outburst. "Why have you sent men to try to kill me?" he asked quietly.

"Because you were dangerous," Thordon snapped.

"How could I be dangerous? Until I found my life being threatened, I did not even suspect that you existed. And even if I had known all about you, I would not have been a menace to you here in this fortress in these frozen wastes."

"When you read this you would have known about me, and you would have been dangerous," Thordon answered, tapping the manuscript. "That is why my actions became necessary."

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"BUT you tried to kill me before I even knew the manuscript was in existence."

"Certainly. I was taking a logical step to avert a possible source of danger. I knew that some day in some way that manuscript would reach your hands. I was never able to find it myself. Tell me, where did you find it?"

"Inside what looked like a tombstone," Ward answered. There was nothing to be gained by attempting to withhold this information. Thordon could find out.

"Curse him, so that is how he tricked me!" Thordon rasped. "How did you know it was hidden there?"

"I didn't," Ward answered honestly.

"Then how did you find it?"

"By accident," Ward answered.

The answer seemed to satisfy Thordon. He turned his attention to the girl and began to question her.

"So there were two of you," Thordon said, when he had finished questioning Patricia. "I knew Ward would send his son to try to destroy me but I did not think Holm would send his daughter. They tricked me again, damn them!"

Ward quickened inwardly. He had learned something that he desperately wanted to know. But he gave no sign. "Why should they want to destroy you?" he said calmly.

"Because—" Thordon caught himself. "You would try to trick me too?" he sneered. His hands moved to a bank of buttons on his desk. An angry gleam lit his eyes. There was no sign of mercy on his face.

Ward held his breath, not daring to move. He sensed the imminence of death. If Thordon pressed one of those buttons—who knew what forces were leashed within the gray fortress? Perhaps pressing one of those butons would send death flaming at them.

"Why should I destroy you?" Thordon said. A vicious smile appeared on his weak face. He looked at the girl. "You, my dear, would make a splendid addition to my collection of beauties. How would you like to join my—ah—harem?"

"I wouldn't like it," Patricia said. She glanced wildly at Ward.

"No doubt you will learn to like it," Thordon said smoothly. "I am told by those who are in a position to know that I am a wonderful lover."

"You—" the girl choked. Disgust and loathing were on her face. She glanced again at Ward, then back at Thordon. "I won't do it. You can't—I won't—"

Ward leaped. Thordon's attention was quite taken up by the girl. Ward hurled himself through the air. His fists were all he had but one blow would be all he needed to break Thordon's pipe-stem neck.

As Ward leaped, Thordon's hand darted swiftly among the buttons set into the top of his desk.

"Ugh!" Ward gasped. In the split second that had elapsed he knew he had been too slow. He did not see anything hit him but something struck him a sickening blow in the stomach. He had the fleeting impression that he was lifted off his feet, spun in a dizzying circle, and then hurled outward. He hit with a crash that left him senseless for a second. When he recovered consciousness he was lying on the floor in the corner of the room. Blood was running down his face and into his mouth. Thordon was looking at him. The little devil was laughing.

HE SAT up just in time to see Patricia Holm attempt what he had tried and failed. Utilizing Thordon's preoccupation with Ward, she leaped at the self-styled master.

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A second later, bruised and bleeding, she was lying on the floor beside Ward. Apparently from the solid front of the desk, a thin, almost invisible beam of light had leaped out in response to Thordon's manipulation of the buttons. It had struck her, seized her, hurled her backward.

Thordon grinned at them. "I am not exactly defenseless," he said. "Have you seen enough or would you like another demonstration?"

"Some other time," Ward gritted. "I'll give *you* a demonstration."

"That's what you think," Thordon said. "After my men finish with you, you will find it exceedingly difficult to demonstrate anything other than the efficient execution of my commands." He pressed another button.

The door quickly opened. A gray clad guard stood there. "You called, sir?" he apologetically asked.

"Yes," Thordon answered. "Have these two escorted to the hypnosis laboratories. Direct that they be given the standard treatments."

"Yes, sir," the guard said, saluting.

He turned to Ward and the girl.

"Get up, you two," he said. "And come with me."

"We've learned one thing," Ward whispered to the girl, as the watchful guard escorted them away.

"What's that?" the girl dully asked.

"Our purpose in life, the instructions we were to receive in the manuscript, is to destroy Thordon. He let that much slip."

"I knew that the moment I saw him," Patricia Holm answered. "The question is—How?"

"No talkin'," the guard said bluntly. "I'll kick the pants off you if you open your traps again!"

THE guard shoved them into a cell. "Wait there until we're ready for you," he said, slamming the iron grill that was the door.

"Well, here we are," Patricia Holm said dispiritedly.

"It looks like I stuck our necks out when I surrendered," Ward admitted. "I'm sorry I got you into this mess."

"I got myself into it," she answered. "And we're not licked yet. There must be some way out of this place. There must be some way we can beat that little devil."

"There is always a way out of everything," Ward said. "Our big problem is to stay alive long enough to find it."

"Do—do you think he is going to kill us?"

"No," Ward hesitated. "But we're in a spot, just the same."

He hated to admit defeat, he hated to think they were trapped without any hope of ever defending themselves. He had foreseen the possibility of some such situation as this and had made plans to meet it. But on the ship they had been carefully searched, very carefully searched. A tiny saw blade, made out of beryllium copper, had been removed from the sole of one of his shoes. A small but efficient tear gas bomb had been removed from the heel of the other shoe. His cigarettes had been taken and he had been stripped and searched to the skin. The gray man had taken no chances.

Three guards appeared at the door of the cell. With them was a fourth person, a stooped, white-haired old man who was clad in the gown of a surgeon.

"Ladies first," one of the guards said.

She did not hesitate. "Here I go," she said, smiling at Ward.

"Good luck, Patricia Holm," Ward gritted.

A startled, dazed look appeared on the surgeon's face. "What—what did he say?" he stammered, nodding toward Ward. His eyes were fixed with terri-

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ble intensity on the girl.

"He wished me good luck," she answered bitterly. "Do you think I'll need it? After all, when you get through with me, I'm only going to join a harem!"

The surgeon seemed not to hear. "Did—did he call you Patricia Holm?" he faltered.

"That's my name," the girl said. "Why shouldn't he call me that?"

"No—no reason," the doctor said. He seemed to regain control of himself. Harshness crept into his voice. "This way," he said. He motioned to the guards. "Watch her closely. If she attempts to resist, over-power her."

"Sure, pop," the guards said. "We know what to do."

Ward watched them march her away. There was bitterness in his heart. He would have given anything to have been able to help her. But there was nothing he could do. To attempt resistance would invite destruction, and both of them must stay alive, no matter what the cost.

TWO hours later the door at the end of the hall opened and Patricia Holm emerged. She was not the same girl who had entered the room that lay beyond. Barely able to walk, she was supported between two guards. The boots and riding breeches she had been wearing had been replaced by a set of gray colored shorts and a gray blouse. And something had happened to her face.

As she was half carried past him, she slowly turned her head in his direction. There was no recognition in her eyes. She didn't know him. Her face was dazed, and without expression or emotion.

She looked—*gray!* With the exception of Thordon, all the people he had seen in this fortress had looked gray. Occasionally their faces showed some animation and they seemed able to talk freely but all emotion was strictly on the surface. It did not come from the soul beneath. Like the gray man, these were gray people.

Patricia Holm showed the same grayness, the same lack of emotion as all the others.

The two men helped her away. They were not gone long.

"Your turn next," they said to Ward, unlocking and opening the door of his cell.

They led him into the laboratory where the white-haired surgeon was waiting. Before he realized what they were going to do, they had seized him, thrown him on an operating table, and were strapping him down. In the last moment, he fought desperately. The surgeon grunted something and four other men came from an adjoining room. The six men speedily strapped him down.

"You may go now," the surgeon said to them.

"Okay, doc," one of them answered. "The boss says to give this guy the works," He jerked a thumb toward Ward.

"I will handle the situation," the surgeon said. "You may be sure of that. Move along now. This is a delicate operation and I must not be disturbed while it is in progress."

The men left the operating room. Ward had overheard the conversation. He bit his lips to keep from screaming. He was helpless, unable to move, and some sort of an operation was going to be performed on him. He saw the face of the surgeon bend down over him.

"Sh—" the doctor whispered.

Was the man mad, Ward wondered wildly.

"Don't become excited," the doctor whispered. "Don't cry out. Are you

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really John Ward, the son of Richard Ward?"

Dumbly, Ward nodded. He didn't in the least understand the meaning of the question. Vehemently he wished the doctor would get on with what he had to do. Being tied down and waiting like a dog for the knife of a vivisectionist was enough to drive a man crazy. "Get on with your damned operation," he gritted. "Whatever it is, I can stand it."

"I'm not going to perform an operation on you," the surgeon said.

"You're not! Why have you got me tied down?"

"Sh—" The doctor glanced quickly toward the door. "You must be quiet. *They* mustn't overhear you."

"What kind of a trick is this?" Ward husked.

"It's no trick," the doctor said. "Do you know who I am?"

"Hell, no."

"I am Judson Holm," came the astounding answer. "I am the father of Patricia Holm!"

"YOU are what?" Ward gasped. He did not, could not believe his ears. His dazed impression was that he was out of his mind.

"I am Judson Holm," the surgeon repeated, his voice a tense whisper. "I am the man who hid you in Los Angeles and who hid Patricia in New York!"

"This is an illusion," Ward thought firmly. "They have already given me an anaesthetic. I am hearing things that aren't true."

Once, as the result of a broken arm, he had been given ether by the doctors who were to set the bone. He still vividly remembered the nightmares he had had during the seconds when he was first going under the influence of the drug. So far as he knew, he had been given no drug here, but he knew from experience that it was difficult to remember that you had taken an anaesthetic after you had taken it. He tried to sit up. The straps jerked him back, reminding him where he was.

"This is nonsense," he whispered.

"No."

"Then one of us is crazy. You can't be the man who concealed me in Los Angeles." "Please, John—. I am telling you the truth. You *must* believe me."

"I don't believe you," Ward said. "You are not Patricia's father."

"But I am," the doctor insisted.

"That's a lie," Ward said. "I saw her when she came out of this room. She could barely walk. She looked drugged and she didn't recognize me. I don't know what you did to her, but I know that no father would do that to his daughter."

"Please," the doctor begged. "Nothing was done to her."

"I saw her," Ward challenged.

"She was acting," the doctor answered. "I pretended to put her under hypnosis but I didn't do it. Instead I spent the time she was in here teaching her how she must act to deceive Thordon. Of course she couldn't show that she recognized you. That might have given her away. For several days after being put under the special type of hypnosis Thordon uses a person remembers little or nothing of his past life. Consequently she could not recognize you."

"Hypnosis," Ward whispered. "That's impossible."

"It isn't impossible," the doctor insisted. "You, yourself, have been hypnotized all your life."

"Now I know you're lying," Ward said. "I never saw a hypnotist in my life, and as for letting one get close enough to me to put me into a trance, I would not be likely to let that happen if I could prevent it."

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HE WAS convinced that for some reason this doctor was trying to deceive him. There was little reason for such an effort, he admitted, for he was strapped to an operating table and the surgeon could work his will with him. Under those circumstances, when his victim was helpless, there was no reason why the doctor should attempt an elaborate deception, but apparently he was trying it anyhow.

"I see I shocked you by telling you too much too soon," the surgeon said. "The mind will accept only so much information at one time. If given more than that, it rebels. When you have time to think, you will realize I am telling the truth. You were, and still are, under hypnosis, and I can prove it."

He seemed very sure of himself. Ward was completely bewildered. "Prove it," he said. "I'm listening."

"All right," the doctor answered. "Here is the first proof. All your life you have been hearing a voice that told you to be on the alert, that something was after you."

Ward stared in astonishment at this man. Was the doctor superhuman? How did he know about the voice?

"When you were less than a year old, I helped implant that voice in your mind," the doctor said. "It was put there by hypnosis. We knew you would be hunted, we knew you would be in danger. This voice was intended to warn you always to be on the alert."

Ward tried to speak and choked. The voice that had spoken to him from the back of his mind, this surgeon had helped put there! Or was the man lying? Was he, for some reason of his own, trying to trick his helpless victim?

"Not so long ago, you received a present, a wrist watch," the surgeon continued. "When you strapped it on your wrist, a voice began to speak to you. You thought the voice came out of the watch, or, by some ingenious system of radio, was transmitted through the watch. You didn't examine the watch. You weren't supposed to examine it, but if you had, you would have found it to be quite an ordinary time-piece. However it was a trigger that released into your mind the post-hypnotic commands impressed there twenty years previously. There was no radio in the watch. There was no tiny record similar to a phonograph. The watch itself was a signal that without your knowing what was happening, or being at all conscious of the process, would release into your mind the post-hypnotic commands that would take you back to the Knoll of the Three Pines, in the swamps of Florida."*

There was conviction in the surgeon's whisper. He spoke like a man who knew what he was talking about. And, there was no questioning his facts. He knew about the voice that had spoken to Ward, he knew about the watch, the three pines on the island in Big Cypress swamp. Was it possible that his story was true?

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* Hypnosis, though an old and legendary art that has fallen into disrepute through use by stage magicians and quacks who tried to take advantage of the potential powers it offered, has been under re-investigation by science recently, with results that promise to be startling. Post-hypnotic commands are orders given to a subject while he is under hypnosis, the commands to be obeyed after the hypnosis has been terminated. If the hypnotist so desires, the subject may be made to retain no knowledge of the orders, until the time comes for them to take effect, when the orders will be executed whether the subject desires it or not and without his knowing what is happening. There are well authenticated instances of such commands being executed after the lapse of a year. In one case, a patient was instructed while under hypnosis to return to the office of the doctor on a day and at an hour over a year away. The patient did not know the command had been given but at the appointed time, he obeyed it. It is probably unnecessary to point out here but it can do no harm to say that hypnotic experiments should never under any circumstances be attempted by those who lack a full understanding of the science.—Ed.

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"But why—why did you go to all that trouble?" Ward questioned. "Why did you use so elaborate a scheme when something simpler might have served."

"Something simpler would not have served!" the doctor vehemently insisted. "There was no other way we could be sure the information would reach you. Remember, we had to wait twenty years, we had to wait until you grew into a man, to tell you what you had to know. Too much could happen in twenty years for a simpler method to serve. You had to be protected through infancy, which meant that you had to be hidden. The manuscript that was to provide you with information must also be hidden. It must be perfectly concealed. The sharpest, keenest, most savagely warped mind on earth knew that you and the manuscript existed. No effort would be spared to find and destroy both. Yet in spite of the enemy that was seeking you, you and the manuscript must be brought together when you were old enough to act on the information you would receive. It was no simple problem that we faced in that cursed swamp so long ago and no simple solution was possible. Now, John, do you believe me?"

WARD was aware that the surgeon was bending over him. He could see the man's face, cut and grooved with lines that could only have come from suffering. "I do not know whether or not I believe you," Ward said slowly. "You have used the word 'we' several times. What do you mean by that 'we'?"

"Your father and myself. I was your father's assistant in his laboratory in Big Cypress swamp."

"And—" Ward tensed himself to ask this question. "—what about my father?"

"He was one of the greatest men who ever lived."

Ward felt a glow at the words. "And where is he now?"

"Dead," the doctor simply said. "He and your mother are buried under the tombstone on the knoll. They were killed—" Anger lit the doctor's eyes and his gaze went toward the door—" by the beast that rules here, by Thordon!"

Ward lay very still. Subconsciously he knew that his parents were dead, but in spite of that, always there had been the hope that somehow, sometime, he would find them. Now he knew that he would never find them. Anger in a red flood of helpless fury rolled through him.

"I must pretend to hypnotize you," the surgeon continued. "I must go through the motions of injecting a drug into your blood, and all the rest of the procedure that Thordon has developed. We never know here when eyes are watching us so I must go through with the operation. That is how Thordon controls all of the thousands who do his bidding. But you will not be hypnotized. You will be left with your will intact. And while I am going through the necessary motions, I will tell you the whole story back of Thordon, the menace that we are trying to fight. Do you understand, John?"

Ward nodded. Relaxing, he closed his eyes. It took a strong effort of will to keep from screaming when he felt a hypodermic needle prick his skin. However, he knew he had no choice except to trust this physician. He was completely in the man's power.

Told in jerky whispers, with the surgeon's eyes constantly darting apprehensively to the door, it was an amazing story that Ward heard. It was over an hour in the telling. While the doctor deftly worked, Ward heard the whole story of his life. Then the surgeon told

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him about Thordon, and what Thordon really was. It was all Ward could do to maintain silence when he learned the secret of Thordon's identity.

"That—that's impossible!" he almost shouted.

"Sh— It isn't impossible. It's the hideous truth. And his purpose is even more hideous. I returned to the Knoll of the Three Pines, to make one final effort to capture or destroy him. Instead, he captured me. For twenty years he has held me prisoner. For the same length of time he has been planning his campaign, gathering strength, kidnaping men and bringing them here where they can be made into creatures with but one thought—to do his will. He built this fortress here where no one would ever look for it. Hundreds of men worked for years building it. It is almost impregnable. From this place, he will launch a campaign that will make him master of the earth, unless we can stop him. He *must* be stopped. No matter what the cost, he must be stopped. Do you understand, John?"

"YES," said Ward slowly. "I even understand why you planned to have your daughter try to destroy him."

"We hated pitting a girl against his evil genius," the doctor almost sobbed. "But we had no choice. We had to use every possible tool that might help to remove him. Richard Ward was sacrificing his son. I could do no less than offer my daughter for the same sacrifice. And when she heard my story she agreed that I had done the right thing." His voice was hoarse with anger.

Ward nodded in sympathy. "I have one final question," he stated. "You said that everyone here, with the exception of Thordon, was under the influence of hypnosis. Does that include you?"

"Yes. I was hypnotized, but this is no longer true."

"How did you break your hypnosis?"

"I didn't break it. No one can break his own mental bonds, or can even realize that they exist. A profound mental and emotional shock is needed to break the effect of hypnosis."

"Then how was your hypnosis broken?"

"Because Thordon made a mistake!" the doctor hissed. "He thought the type of hypnosis he was using was unbreakable. It wasn't. I have been performing his operations for him. He thought it would be a clever and exceedingly funny joke to send me my own daughter to be made into a plaything for him. Instead, the shock of hearing you call her Patricia Holm, of realizing that this girl was my daughter, *brought me out of my hypnosis*. Thordon, after all these years, has finally made one mistake. And that mistake will destroy him."

Holm's eyes were blazing. For years, he had been beaten, he had seen no chance of ever striking against his enemy. Like John Ward, he had been helpless. Now he saw a chance to strike back. The surge of renewed hope was strong in his voice.

"I am going to release the straps that hold you and call the guards to take you away," he said to Ward. "If they ask you questions, pretend you understand nothing. Act, as Patricia is acting, knowing that your life, and the lives of uncounted others, depends on it. I have already been making plans for action. We will destroy this evil monster in his own lair."

After Holm released the straps, Ward sat up. Within his mind was the intoxicating knowledge that he was free, that his will was his own. He had found the monster that had been seeking his life. In secrecy, he and Patricia

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and Holm could prepare complete plans for attacking Thordon.

Holm rang for the guards to take Ward away. The door opened.

"Did you call?" a derisive voice said.

Neither Ward nor Holm had been looking at the door when it opened. At the sound of the voice the surgeon seemed to freeze. His face was suddenly drained of all color. Ward jerked startled eyes to the door.

It wasn't a guard who stood there.

It was Thordon!

"You will no doubt be interested to know that for years I have had a microphone pick-up planted in this laboratory," Thordon said. "I found your conversation very interesting. You ought to know by now, Doctor Holm, that I never make mistakes!"

CHAPTER VII

The Weakness of Thordon

THORDON was not much over five feet tall, not a big man. Physically he looked immature, the completely bald head and the smile on his face giving him an impish appearance something like that of a benevolent gnome. But there was nothing benevolent about his eyes. Cold, chilled hatred looked out of them.

"Hello," Ward said.

There was no point in his attempting to act like he was under hypnosis. Thordon knew better. There was only one possible course of action—stall. No guards had entered with Thordon. He was carrying no weapon. Lying on the table beside Thordon was a metal bar, a part of the equipment of the laboratory. If Ward could stall long enough to get his hands on that bar!

Thordon's eyes glittered as he looked at Ward. "You're a cool customer," he said.

"Thank you."

"You have nothing to thank me for," Thordon asserted. "Do you know what I am going to do?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"I am going to complete the operation that Holm failed to do!" Thordon said. "I am going to give you a double dose of drug and put you into a hypnosis that you will never break. How will you like that?"

"I'm afraid I won't like it," Ward answered, shrugging indifferently. "But I am afraid there is nothing I can do about it—*except this!*"

He had been moving toward Thordon. Now he took one single step and the bar was in his hands.

"Don't, John!" he heard the old surgeon scream.

Ward swung the bar. Years of accumulated hate went into the blow. This monstrosity had hunted him around the world. This super-evil genius, who had built the incredible airship that had brought them here, who had designed this fortress hidden where no one would ever find it, who had thought to rule the world, had fallen a victim to his own over-powering sense of superiority. Because he was in his own stronghold, Thordon had felt completely secure. He had fallen into the simplest possible trap, over-confidence.

Thordon saw the bar coming. A surprised glint appeared in his eyes. Oddly he did not try to dodge. Hands on hips, he stood without moving.

In the last final split second before the blow landed Ward sensed that something was wrong. Thordon showed too little surprize. He didn't try to dodge.

A foot away from Thordon's head the bar hit something. The jar almost wrenched Ward's arms from their sockets. He lost his balance and almost fell, the bar clattering to the floor.

Thordon stood unharmed.

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"There is a vibration field surrounding me," he said coldly. "No material object, and especially nothing that is made of metal, will penetrate it. I control it from here." He patted a small flat box that, attached to his belt, rested on his right hip. "Do you suppose I would be fool enough to come near you without protection? You can't touch me. Nothing can touch me, not even the discharge of one of my own electron guns, without my permission. *You old fool, what are you doing?"*

THORDON looked across the laboratory at the old doctor. A startled note had appeared in his voice.

Dr. Holm as coming toward him. The surgeon held a plain glass beaker filled with some colorless liquid in his hands. The sight of the liquid seemed to drive Thordon frantic. With the speed of a cornered rat, he turned, jerked the door open, and dashed from the room.

Dr. Holm quickly locked the door.

"What have you got in that beaker?" Ward almost shouted. "An acid that will eat through the vibration field that protects him?"

He was almost as startled as Thordon had been. What had the surgeon used to scare the would-be world master so badly?

"No acid," Holm answered. "Water. Just plain water."

"Water!" You mean he was scared of nothing but a little water?"

"If I had doused the contents of this beaker on him, it would have shorted his vibration shield. The results might not have been fatal but he would certainly have been badly burned as the high-frequency energies were shorted into his body. He didn't know that I knew the defect of his shield, which is one mistake he made anyhow," the doctor triumphantly finished.

A few drops of water had routed Thordon! It seemed impossible but there was no doubt that it was true. The invisible shield on which he relied for defense was a mass of inter-woven high-frequency electrical vibrations. Water would short electricity.

"A little H_2O may make Thordon tuck his tail between his legs and head for a hole but you can bet it won't affect those guards of his!" Ward said grimly. "They'll be after us hot and heavy. Doc, do you know any way out of here?"

As he spoke, alarm bells began ringing through the fortress. In the hall outside the laboratory, a clatter sounded —guards coming on the double-quick.

"There is no way out of here," Holm answered. "And if there was, we could not use it." He stepped to a window, shoved aside a metal lattice.

Outside, stretching away for miles under a sullen sky, was an ice field. Even through the heavy glass of the window, it looked bitterly cold. Ward had never seen what lay around the fortress. At no time during the flight of the ship had he been permitted to look out. The flier had gone directly into a hangar on landing. Now, for the first time, he saw the tortuous fields of ice that surrounded the place.

"You don't escape from here," Doctor Holm said. "A few, on whom the effect of the hypnosis had faded, tried it. The wolves got them. There are hundreds of miles of ice caps around this fortress. The only way to escape from here is by the ship."

"What chance do we have of getting that ship?"

"No chance at all," Holm answered. "It's guarded twenty-four hours a day."

WARD shook his head. "Well, I wasn't exactly thinking of escaping from the fortress, not while Pat is

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here anyhow. I was wondering if there isn't some place where we can hide for a while. You ought to know your way around here. Isn't there some place where they can't find us?"

"I'm afraid there isn't. No, John, there is no way to escape. I hate to say it, but I think the trail ends here."

"Hey, what are you doing?" Ward demanded.

Holm had picked up a hypodermic syringe and was carefully filling it with a liquid from a tiny bottle. "I'm going to cheat Thordon," he said. He bared his left arm.

"You're going to kill yourself!" Ward gasped. He snatched the syringe away. "What the hell has come over you, Doc? Not two minutes ago you were willing to face Thordon. Now you're trying to knock yourself off."

The surgeon wiped sweat from his face. "I can't face being hypnotized again," he said. "I won't do Thordon's dirty work for him any more. I won't. I would rather be dead. You don't understand—"

Ward understood all right. It had taken tremendous courage for the surgeon to defy Thordon. When the effort had failed, reaction had set in. Holm could no longer face the future. He preferred to die.

"Never give up until they pat you in the face with a spade," Ward said. "We're not dead yet."

"What are we going to do?" the surgeon whispered. "They're—"

A heavy thud sounded as the door was assaulted. Ward had been making a quick survey of the room. On one side was a large closet, across the room was a second door that led to another part of the fortress.

"We're going to hide in that closet," Ward said.

"But they'll find us—"

"Maybe." He shoved the frightened and panicky doctor into the closet, raced across the lab and jerked open the second door, then ran back and dived into the narrow space where Holm was hiding. "We'll see what happens," he said, closing the closet.

With a crash, the main door fell. Heavy footsteps sounded as the guards lunged into the room. Ward held his breath and waited.

"Where are they?" he heard one guard say.

"The boss said they were here," another one answered, doubt in his voice.

"Maybe they're hiding here. Search the joint," a third ordered.

"They wouldn't be dumb enough to try to hide here," someone protested. "Hey. That door is open. They went that way. Get 'em. The boss promised a big reward if we took those babies alive."

YELPING like dogs closing in for the kill, the guards went piling through the door. Ward sighed in vast relief. "They're like Thordon," he whispered. "Anything that looks simple, is not worth thinking about."

"Yes," the surgeon faltered. "But—"

"I know they will be back," Ward answered. "We're not done yet. Tell me: if I can catch one of these guards for you, can you hypnotize him so he will obey you?"

"Yes. I think so. But—"

"I'll get the guard," Ward said. "You handle your end, Doc, and I'll handle mine." Opening the door a crack, he looked over the lab. It was deserted. He stepped out.

Footsteps sounded in the hall outside as a single guard came hurrying to join his comrades. Ward crouched beside the door. He let the man enter. Then he came up from behind him. One hand seized the stubby weapon, the other arm went around the guard's

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throat in a lock that effectively prevented any outcry.

The guard did not realize he was attacked until the fierce grip was clamped around his throat. He tried to jerk himself free. The grip tightened. It was not only preventing him from calling for help, it was shutting off his wind. And try as he might, he could not shake off the man on his back. His face began to turn purple and his eyes to glaze. His struggles only made the end come quicker. Unconscious, he slumped to the floor.

Ward swiftly stripped the gray uniform from the man and jerked off his own clothes. Working as fast as possible, he made a complete change. Then he lifted the guard to the operating table.

"Get busy, Doc," he said huskily. "I'll try to hold the fort while you put the fixer on him."

Doctor Holm had been preparing his instruments. Ward picked up the guard's weapon, closed both doors, and prepared to try to stand off the attack he was expecting at any moment.

"What will I impress on his mind?" the surgeon asked, slipping a hypodermis under the guard's skin.

"Tell him he's badly scared, tell him everybody is after him, tell him he has to run—"

He heard the doctor begin a chant in a sing-song voice.

"You are badly frightened. The men in the gray uniforms are after you. You must run from them. You must not let them catch you. You must hide. If they catch you, they will kill you—"

The chant continued with growing tensity. Watching, Ward saw the guard begin to recover consciousness. The man was not strapped to the table. He sat up and looked around. "Where are they?" he gulped.

The pound of running feet sounded in the hall outside.

"Go that way," Ward said, pointing to the second door. "Quickly. There is not a moment to lose."

When the second set of guards came rushing into the laboratory they were just in time to see a man dressed in civilian clothes running madly away. There was no one else in sight.

"There he goes!" a guard shouted.

"Get him!" a second added.

THEY raced through the laboratory on the heels of the fleeing man.

"It's Ward all right," one of them shouted. "I know him by the clothes. Nobody here wears a suit like that."

When they were gone, Ward and Holm came out of the closet. Ward was wiping perspiration from his face. "That was close," he said. "Thirty seconds either way and it would have failed."

"That was fast thinking," the doctor said admiringly. "You did a marvelous job of tricking them. By the time they discover they are chasing one of their own comrades dressed in your clothes—"

"By that time, we'll have Pat and be on our way to grab the ship. Where will she be held prisoner?"

"In the harem, which adjoins the office where Thordon interviewed you when you were first brought here."

"Then that's where we're going!"

"We're almost certain to be seen," the surgeon protested. "Not that I object to taking the chance, now that we *have* a chance, but we must not get caught now."

"If anybody tries to stop us, I still have *this!*" Ward answered, patting the weapon nestled in the crook of his arm. "I won't hesitate to use it. As for anybody challenging us, you walk in front of me and I'll keep you covered. If anybody asks questions, you are my

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captive and I'm taking you to Thordon. Got it?"

"Got it, John," Doctor Holm said. Cringing, hands in air, looking as if he expected to be blown to bits at any moment, he walked out of the laboratory.

"Please don't shoot," he begged, looking over his shoulder. "I didn't mean to do it. Ward forced me—"

"I don't want to listen to any of your damned whining," Ward said gruffly. "Move along, before I burn you to a cinder."

His face blank and impersonal, he prodded the surgeon before him.

In the hall outside two guards came toward them.

"I got one of 'em," Ward said. "The other is back there." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "I think he's trying to reach the ship. You better help cut him off. I'll take this one to the boss."

"Good!" one of the gray-faced men said. "Thordon is raising hell. He's mad as the devil."

Ward sighed with relief as they went past him. They were tools that obeyed Thordon's will without question, but they were blunt tools. The trouble with hypnosis was that it did not leave a man free to act on his own initiative. If the guards had been alert, they would have recognized him. But they saw the uniform, the gun, and the captive, which was enough for them. They weren't free to think for themselves.

AS HE marched the cringing surgeon before him, Ward caught a glimpse through a window of the long building in which the ship was housed. It stood apart from the main fortress, a tunnel at the end connecting it with a larger building. The enclosure formed a sort of court, which was banked deep with snow.

Ahead was Thordon's office, the lair from which he directed the activities of this little mad world he had created. With each step that took him nearer to the door, Ward felt his heart beating harder. If they could rescue Pat!

There could be no ifs about that. They had to rescue her. Then they had to capture the ship. Ward was hoping that his uniform would enable him to take both the girl and her father to the vessel, under the pretext, if questioned, that he was taking them to Thordon. There was a desperate chance that this plan might work. All his life he had been making desperate chances work. They approached the door.

"Drop the gun!" a voice said behind them.

Ward and the surgeon froze in their tracks. Ward did not drop the weapon. His mind was working like lightning. Should he try to turn, shooting as he whirled? Or should he surrender? It was Thordon's voice that had spoken to them. He had been lurking in a side door and had waited until they passed, after which he had come up behind them. He was probably protected by a door, he was certainly protected by the vibration shield. And there was no water handy with which to short out the field.

"If you hesitate five seconds longer, I'll burn a hole in both of you," Thordon said. His voice was as cold as the wind that blows down from the north pole.

Ward dropped the gun. He had no choice.

"That's better," Thordon said. "If I didn't need men, I would take no further chances with you."

"How—how did you find us?" Ward whispered. "Your men—"

"My men are fools," Thordon said. "They are chasing somebody dressed in your clothes."

"How—how—"

"You forgot that I told you I had a

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microphone pickup hidden in that laboratory," Thordon gloated. "You tricked my men but I heard every word of your plans. As soon as I can recall the fools, I will escort you to my office. That was where you were going, wasn't it?"

Under his breath, Ward cursed himself. He had completely forgotten about the microphone. Thordon had overheard their whole conversation.

CHAPTER VIII

In Thordon's Office

CLANGING alarm bells recalled the guards. One group brought with them a prisoner.

"Here he is, boss," they said. "We caught him. We got him for you, boss."

The prisoner was badly mussed. Both eyes were puffy, there was a long gash on the side of his head, and one arm hung limp at his side.

Thordon took one look at him. His eyes glinted. He brought up the weapon he carried. The fury of a blasting electrical discharge lashed through the corridor. The prisoner screamed, choked. Smoke boiling from a hole in his body, he fell.

"I hate bunglers," Thordon icily said, lowering his weapon. "I hate fools. Also I have no use for a man with a broken arm."

"His arm would have healed," Ward said.

Thordon looked at him. "One more word out of you," he said, "and you will get the same treatment."

Ward shut up. Thordon would not hesitate to carry out his threat. The guards also relapsed into sudden silence. They seemed less awed by the killing of their comrade than by Thordon's anger.

"Cover them," Thordon said. "If they attempt to escape, blast them. You two," he looked at Ward and Holm, "march ahead of me to my office. There I will personally handle the necessary injections and put you into hypnosis."

They had no choice but to obey. As they started forward, Ward saw the surgeon's face. Doctor Holm had aged years within the past few minutes. The muscles of his face had sagged and a gray perspiration was oozing from his skin. All hope had fled. They had never had much of a chance. Now even that chance was gone.

"No regrets, Doc," Ward whispered. "We tried and failed. That's all there is to it."

"I'm sorry, John," the surgeon answered. "I'm terribly sorry. I had hoped—"

"Some day Thordon *will make* a mistake," Ward said. "He will forget something, pull a boner, and somebody will pay him off. Where ever we are then, I have a hunch we'll know it has happened."

"I hope so, John," Holm sighed. "But I fear it will never happen."

The door of Thordon's hideaway was closed.

"Open it," the dictator said. "And go right on in."

Ward opened the door. He and the surgeon walked through side by side. Doctor Holm took one look inside the room and hesitated in his stride.

"What—" he gulped.

Ward did not hesitate. He saw the same thing that Holm saw but he did not have to stop to think before he acted. He bent over, smashed his body into the surgeon, shoving Holm to one side.

PATRICIA HOLM was seated at Thordon's desk. Her hands were

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on the bank of buttons that controlled the powers the dictator had built into that seemingly innocent piece of furniture. Thordon's view of her was cut off by the two captives he was herding in front of him. Ward leaped to one side in order to permit free play of the forces that could, as he knew from experience, lash out from that desk.

"Blast—" Thordon started to shout to his men as his prisoners leaped to one side. He thought they were trying to escape. Then he saw the girl. The words froze in his throat. If he had been frozen instantaneously he could not have stopped quicker. His face went green with sudden, terrible fright.

There was silence in the room. Not a man moved.

"What'll we do, boss?" one of the guards whispered. "Shall we turn the heat on her?"

"No, you damned fool!" Thordon gritted.

The girl spoke for the first time. "Send them away," she said.

Thordon licked his lips. The vein in his throat was throbbing madly and the green color on his face was growing greener.

"Send them away!" Patricia Holm said. In her voice were the same grim tones that Ward had heard there when she had told him to drop the manuscript back on the Knoll of the Three Pines. Her fingers pressed lightly on the buttons.

"Go away!" Thordon shrieked at his men. Only too well did he know the terrible powers hidden within his desk.

"But, boss—"

"I said to go away!" the dictator screamed. He was growing frantic for fear the girl would press the button.

The men hesitantly started to obey.

"Before you leave, lay your guns on the floor," Patricia Holm said. "All of you except Thordon. If you—" she looked at the dictator—"move a finger, you know what will happen. You have a gun. Hold it until I tell you to lay it down."

"Good girl!" Ward thought. She was taking no chances of Thordon shooting while he pretended to lay down his weapon. He was the key to the situation. As long as she controlled him, she had the whole fortress in her power.

"Do what she says," Thordon gritted to his men.

The dictator did not move a muscle. Held in the crook of his left arm was a gun but he didn't attempt to raise it. His men began to lay their guns on the floor.

"Go completely outside the fortress," the girl said to them.

"Out in the snow?" one of them protested. "We'll freeze."

"You won't freeze within an hour or two. As soon as everything is under control here, you will be permitted to return. Move along, now."

THERE was authority in her voice and the guards had been instructed to obey authority. They began to leave the room. Down the hall, Ward could hear a door opening as they went outside. They were obeying her. If they had been normal men, once they were out of her power, they would have defied her. But their freedom of thought and action had been removed by the hypnosis that held them.

The four of them, Thordon and the girl, Judson Holm and John Ward, were left alone in the room.

"When you secure recruits for your harem," Patricia Holm said, "you must make certain they are under hypnosis. You overlooked the fact that I was not in your power, with the result that I found my way here at

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a very inconvenient time for you. Now you may lay down your gun."

"What are you going to do with me?" Thordon whispered.

"Lay down your gun!" was the answer. No cat ever watched a mouse with greater concentration than that showed by Patricia Holm at that moment. Her fingers over the bank of buttons, her eyes followed every move he made.

"Lay it down slowly," she said.

Thordon knew better than to disobey her. Chagrin and humiliation on his face, he bent and slowly laid the weapon on the floor.

Patricia Holm expelled her breath in a panting sigh. The tension was over. Thordon had given up his gun. She could relax for a second.

"Watch out!" John Ward shouted.

He saw what was happening. He had not attempted to speak to Patricia for fear he might distract her attention. As Thordon straightened up, his hands came past the flat box worn on his hip. One fast jab of his fingers was all that was necessary. Instantly the vibration web was around him, protecting him like a glove.

"Even the power concealed in the instruments in my desk will not penetrate this shield!" he said. "Now what are you going to do?"

Dimly visible around him, like an aura of evil, the vibration web glittered in the air.

For a split second, Patricia Holm looked startled. Then her fingers stabbed down on the buttons on the desk. A wave of force leaped out. It struck the dictator and the protecting shield flamed with intolerable brilliance as the fighting frequencies canceled each other. Energies blasted themselves into incandescence. Thordon stood unharmed.

Then he turned and ran.

"He knows if we can't destroy him here, he can't destroy us either," Doctor Holm snapped. "He's gone to organize an attack. John—"

But Ward was already moving. Scooping a gun from the plentiful supply of weapons on the floor, he followed Thordon. "You two stay here," he flung over his shoulder.

Thordon was half way down the corridor when Ward caught a glimpse of him. He brought the weapon up, then saw that it was useless. The dictator was still protected by the vibration web.

"If he gets out of sight in this rathole, I'll never be able to find him!" Ward thought.

THORDON obviously knew every corner in the fortress. He had designed it, supervised its construction. But he had never planned for an attack from within and he had constructed no defenses to meet such an attack. If his men had not been sent away, he would have been able to meet the situation that now faced him. The catch was, his men had been sent completely out of the fortress. Although Ward didn't know it, there was only one thing left that Thordon could do—reach the ship and escape. Once away from the fortress, he could pick up his men and organize an attack.

Ward was greatly surprised when Thordon, instead of attempting to hide somewhere in the interior of the grim pile, opened a door that led outside.

"Has he lost his head?" Ward wondered. "If he goes outside, he won't have a chance."

When he reached the door, he found it locked. Grimly he backed off and released a bolt from the stubby weapon of aluminum and glass that he carried. A lightning flash would not have shattered the door more effectively.

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Ward got outside just in time to see Thordon running across a court toward a large building on the opposite side. He recognized that building. It was the hangar where the ship was kept. Set in the outer wall was a small door.

Thordon could have gone around and been under cover all the way. Instead, protected by his web shield, he was taking a short cut directly across the open court. Snow was piled in the court, but the wind had gathered it into drifts. Thordon was running around the drifts.

Off to the right, at a distance of several hundred yards, was a group of black dots—the guards.

"Move back," Thordon was shouting at them. "I'll pick you up in the ship."

Ward took a quick shot at the fleeing dictator. A snow drift exploded into steam. Unharmed Thordon ran on. He vanished into the hangar.

Ward stopped long enough in the courtyard to do one thing. Anyone watching him would have thought he had lost his mind. He made a snowball. Then he blasted the door aside and dived into the hangar. Already the roof was swinging aside overhead. Thordon, after operating the mechanism that released the huge doors overhead, was just entering the ship. He was going in the door at the nose that led straight to the control room. The door slammed shut in Ward's face.

A soft throbbing came from the vessel as the titanic energies that lifted it were set in motion. Minutes were needed to warm up the motors. The ship began to rise.

WITH a complete disregard for safety, Thordon kicked the ship upward. He was in the control room. Down below him he could see the fortress dwindle in size as the vessel rose. He shook his fist at it.

"I've licked you, damn you!" he shouted.

A click sounded behind him. Thordon turned. John Ward stood in the door. But cuddled in the crook of his left arm was the weapon he had picked from the floor before he left the fortress. His right hand was behind him.

"I came in the middle lock as the ship was taking off," he said.

"So what?" Thordon jeered. "I'm still the winner. That electron rifle you hold is worthless against my screen."

Ward nodded. "Yes, I believe that is true," he said. "But—" he nodded toward the complex control board "—is it also worthless against the mechanisms of this ship?"

A startled look appeared on Thordon's face. "If you smash the controls, both of us will be killed in the crash," he pointed out.

"That, I believe, is also true," Ward admitted. His voice was calm and there was no trace of emotion in it. "From my viewpoint, death is of little importance—*if I take you with me.*"

Thordon's eyes glinted as he realized what the other had said. "You—you won't do that?" he faltered.

"Won't I?" Ward answered.

"No. You're bluffing. You wouldn't dare—"

"You seem to forget that for years you have sent men to try to kill me," Ward interrupted. "Do you think I am likely to forget the years when I was hunted like an animal?"

"That won't happen again. I promise you that you will be safe, forever, from me."

"Could I trust your promise?" Ward asked.

"Yes. Of course you can trust it," Thordon said hastily.

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"I could—like hell!" Ward answered. "Now that I know what you are, now that I know that you plan to become the supreme power on earth, and especially since I am probably the only person who knows enough about you to oppose you, would you let me go free? Not in a thousand years you wouldn't, Thordon, and I know it."

The master of the gray men had been lying and he knew it. Thordon could lie to his slaves and they would believe him. Ward did not believe him.

"All right," Thordon admitted. "But you can't destroy me, and I know it. I can't harm you when I have no weapons, and you know that. This is a stalemate, Ward. Neither of us can win."

THERE was a note of triumph in his voice. In a stalemate, Thordon could win. Ward could not harm him. He could wait for hours, days, if need be. Ward would have to relax his vigilance sometime. Human endurance could last only so long and no longer. Ward would have to sleep, to rest. And when he did—

"A stalemate such as this means you lose!" Thordon said. "The weapon you have cannot penetrate my shield. Other weapons are stored in the locker in this control room. I have only to walk across the room and select one. You will be powerless to stop me."

"Will I?" said Ward.

"Yes," Thordon answered savagely.

"I think not," Ward said. He took his right hand from behind his back, held it, palm up, toward Thordon.

"Look at that," he said.

In his hand was the snowball he had made in the courtyard.

Thordon looked at it. The greenish tinge had vanished from his face. It began to return.

"Odd, isn't it, that a simple little thing like a snowball should be powerful enough to destroy you and your grandiose schemes?" Ward said. "But that is exactly what it will do. Snow is simply frozen water vapor. When it strikes your shield it will turn to water. Water will short out the high frequency defense screen that protects you. Ah—"

Thordon had leaped across the room toward the locker that held the electron rifles. Ward hurled the snowball. It struck the web screen of high frequency energy that protected Thordon.

Hell broke loose where that snowball struck. A searing circle of fire leaped into existence. Thordon screamed. Then his flashing fingers cut off the shield. He leaped straight at Ward, knocking the stubby electron gun from the latter's hands.

Ward tried to strike at him. He felt Thordon's arms wrap around his neck. The would-be dictator was scratching and clawing like some gigantic and maniacal cat. Wrestling, they struggled across the control room. Ward tripped and fell, Thordon landing on top of him.

There was a clank, and a blast of frigid air surged into the room. Out of the corner of his eyes, Ward saw that the door of the control room had opened. In falling they had stumbled against the level that released it.

Ward struggled to his feet. Thordon was clawing at him. He felt a knee gouge into his groin and he almost doubled over with the pain. He mustn't lose this fight. He couldn't lose this fight. He shook himself free. His left, moving in a short jabbing arc that had all his weight behind it, connected solidly with Thordon's chin.

The dictator staggered backward. He didn't see the open lock, until he was in it. He tried to grab the edges of the door. His eyes almost popped from their sockets with the strain. His fingers slipped, caught, slipped again.

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A scream on his lips, Thordon fell through the port.

The ship was miles high by now. The scream was choked off in the thin air of the lower reaches of the stratosphere. The ground was miles away. Thordon was a black dot that fell and fell and fell.

"THE truth about him is that he wasn't human at all," Ward said. He had succeeded in landing the ship and had joined Patricia and her father in the office that Thordon once had occupied.

"Then what was he?" the girl questioned.

"Your father told me," Ward answered, nodding toward the surgeon. "He was a synthetic."

"A what?" the girl gasped. She looked toward her father for an explanation.

The old man sighed. He looked like a person who has received a last-minute reprieve from hanging and can scarcely believe the good news. "Richard Ward and myself, after a series of elaborate experiments, created him in a test tube. That was our old laboratory that you saw in ruins on the Knoll of the Three Pines. We naturally sought a secluded place to carry on our experiments. And Thordon—although we didn't call him that—was a synthetic creation. We raised him in a nutrient bath that was constantly under the influence of X-rays. We were hoping to produce a person of exceptional intelligence who could solve problems for which we humans, with our limited brains, can as yet find no solution. Unfortunately, we succeeded too well. Our creation was smarter than we were. He was also possessed of no moral code of any kind, nor could we teach him one. He had no respect for the bill of rights or the Ten Commandments and he sneered at us for believing in them. Eventually we discovered that he was planning to kill us and set out on his own. This discovery was made when Richard Ward found that he had already been infected with a subtle poison that was slowly killing him. Thordon escaped to the swamps and we couldn't find him. Under those circumstances, we did the only possible thing—dedicated the lives of our own children to his destruction, for which—" he looked at the two of them—"I hope we may be forgiven."

"There is nothing to be forgiven for," Ward said. "He had to be destroyed. You did the right thing."

"I am glad you can say so, John," the old man said. "We were young men in those days and we dreamed great dreams of benefiting the human race by creating a super-intelligence to help them solve their problems. My crown of sorrow is that we failed."

"But you haven't failed," Ward objected.

"How can you say that?"

"First, tell me if it is possible to restore Thordon's men to their normal selves."

"Of course it is. It will take a few weeks to treat them all but it is entirely possible."

"Then you haven't failed," Ward said. "When the secrets of Thordon's airship, and the secrets of his fortress, are fully investigated and given to the world, all mankind will receive inestimable benefits. No, Doctor Holm, although things did not work out the way you had planned them, you certainly have not failed. Has he, Pat?"

"I should say not," the girl answered. Her eyes smiled at him unafraid.

THE END.

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"You lose. Want to bet another bullet?"

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The Luck Of ENOCH HIGGINS

by

CHARLES R. TANNER

Maybe luck isn't just something that happens to you; it might be a sort of seventh sense or something. Anyway, Enoch Higgins thought so and invented a way of developing that sense.

WHENEVER I hear anybody speak of luck, I think of old Enoch Higgins. There was a fellow who really *had* luck. And even when his luck appeared to be at its worst, it turned out to be good. But then, Enoch sort of stacked the cards, you might say; he was the first man in history to ring in a cold deck on the Fates. Let me tell you how it happened.

In the first place, old Enoch Higgins was about the most exasperating man in our town. He had a way about him—testy, arrogant, domineering—none of those words described him completely, I'm forced to fall back on that one word, exasperating.

And poor Elmer Bidwell, who was engaged to Enoch's daughter, Laura, was in a position which made him the butt of all of Enoch's testiness, arrogance and domination. For Elmer had met Laura and fallen in love with her while still in school, and after graduation he had got a job as laboratory assistant in the big chemical works in our town, and lo and behold, the man he was assigned to work with was none other than old Enoch, his sweetheart's father.

It didn't take Enoch long to find out that the young "sprout" who was going out with Laura was none other than his lab assistant, and after that he cheerfully blackmailed him into work-

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ing many and many an hour overtime, in Enoch's home. He'd come to the boy, sweet as pie (or at least, as sweet as he could), and invite him out to the house, and Elmer, all anxious to spend as much time as he could with Laura, would eagerly assent—and after supper Enoch would haul him away to the laboratory, and it would be eleven or twelve o'clock before he'd turn Elmer loose.

And, of course, long before that time, Laura would have become tired of waiting and would have gone to bed, or to a show, or maybe to some girl friend's house.

Well, it doesn't take a young fellow long to get tired of a thing like that. You can imagine how much those two were in love when I tell you that they put up with that situation, and with Enoch's intolerable ways for nearly a year before the events which I'm going to tell about took place. Put up with them and were still in love!

ONE day, after the usual invitation and supper, Enoch came to Elmer with a deck of cards in his hand. They weren't ordinary playing cards, there were only twenty-five of them and there were five of each kind. One kind had a circle on it, one a square, and one a star. The others were parallel lines and wavy lines.

Of course, you will probably recognize the fact that these were a deck of the famous E. S. P. cards, but at that time, Elmer had never heard of the famous Dr. Rhine, nor of his experiments with extra-sensory perception and telepathy, so he was quite ignorant of Enoch's intentions.

It took the old man only a minute to show the boy what he wanted, however. He shuffled the cards, laid them on the table and told him to guess the order in which the cards lay. It seemed a silly sort of game but Elmer did as he was ordered, and then handed Enoch the paper on which he had written his guesses. The old man glanced at it, said "Humph!" in a disgusted sort of way, shuffled the cards and ordered him to guess again.

Elmer guessed again. This time old Higgins was more interested. He studied the sheet on which his young friend had written his guesses, made a note or two on it, and in another minute Elmer was guessing for a third time.

Pretty soon Laura excused herself and left the dining room. Elmer tried to catch her eye as she went out, but in vain. He sighed, picked up his pencil and under the imperious eye of old Enoch, began his fourth series of guesses.

After a while, they adjourned to the library. Higgins decided that he'd try to do a little guessing, himself, so Elmer had to shuffle and keep score. And they kept it up until long after midnight, and when Elmer left, Enoch insisted that he come back the next night.

Elmer came back, all right, for Higgins' request was a command, and jobs didn't grow on trees in those days. He came back the next night, too, and for many a night thereafter. And did his life go haywire, what with seeing Laura every night at supper, and yet practically never having a minute alone with her. Before long he was thinking half-seriously of suicide, and seriously of joining the army.

And then old Enoch got another screwy idea. You see, even when he wasn't experimenting with Elmer, his entire mind was taken up with this strange, newly-discovered principle of extra-sensory perception, or clairvoyance. Dr. Rhine's experiments had started him off, but old Enoch wasn't

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the one to tread the careful, patient path that Rhine had undertaken. That testy old codger wanted to get at the heart of things at once, and no sooner was he convinced of the authenticity of E. S. P. than he began to try it out in all sorts of unorthodox ways.

FOR instance, Elmer came to the house one evening, and for the first time since he'd been coming, there was wine on the table. Enoch insisted on him drinking a couple of glasses, and later, in the library, made him down a glass of whisky, straight. Then he started again with that infernal deck of cards. He seemed real delighted when Elmer couldn't guess one right in three times.

And whisky was only the beginning. Next time, Elmer had to take a dose of caffeine, and before long, he had him taking anytal and barbitrates and weird looking concoctions that Elmer felt sure were drugs. He tried him out with hormone extracts, too, and finally he began mixing the stuff.

And then, one night, after it seemed that Elmer had taken about everything in the pharmacopoeia, straight and mixed, he handed the boy some kind of stuff that tasted like arnica smells, and after Elmer drank it, he began his eternal card-guessing and—*ran through the deck twice without guessing a card wrong!*

Now, if you know anything about the law of averages, you'll know what a remarkable statement that is. With five different cards in the deck, of course, a man has one chance in five of guessing right. Out of twenty-five cards, he ought to average five correct guesses. But Elmer guessed fifty right out of fifty!

And Elmer was scared. Elmer wasn't one of these heroic characters who want to be a master of men and wield weird powers and have people in awe of him; and when he pulled an impossible stunt like that it was like having a ghost suddenly look over his shoulder.

So next day, at the laboratory, he pleaded sick when Enoch invited him, as usual, to come out for supper. And with one excuse or another, he managed to keep away from Higgins' place for a week. But by that time, his fear wore off, and his desire to see Laura induced him to again accept Enoch's invitation.

The old man said little before supper. That wasn't unusual, however, and Elmer knew better than to accept it as a favorable sign. It was after he had finished his supper and had lighted up one of his atrocious cigars that Enoch became—sinister.

"This extra-sensory stuff," he started off. "You know, I've really begun to make some progress with it. I guess you realize that, Elmer, you got a dose that nearly scared you to death last week. Yes, it did," holding up a hand as Elmer started to protest. "You've been shying away from here all week because you got scared when I gave you that shot last Friday.

"But I've been working like a trooper all this week," he went on. "And at last I've got what I've been working for, I believe. Now, look here." Somehow he managed to pin both of them down with a single glance. "What I've been trying to do is to find out a satisfactory explanation of just what *luck* is. And I think I've got it. You know, hunches, streaks of luck, so-called lucky breaks—they occur too often to be accidents, they should have a scientific reason.

"Well, I've found it. To make it short and sweet, I've learned that there are a certain combination of hormones —a certain balance that may occa-

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sionally occur in the body—that makes a person very susceptible to extra-sensory perception. 'Course, the perception is by the subconscious mind, and the sub-conscious transmits them, *without explanation,* to the conscious. The result is that the conscious mind feels it as a guess or a vague hunch, although really the truth has been perceived by the sub-conscious.

"Now," his eyes began to glisten, "now, I've found out just what that rare balance of hormones really is—and I can produce it, synthetically, in just the right combination."

ELMER looked at Laura, and she looked back at him. They didn't grasp the full implications of Enoch's statement at all. And Enoch saw that they didn't and snorted scornfully.

"Heh! You don't see it, do you? Look, I'll reduce it to words of one syllable. I can give you a shot of good luck, just like a doctor can give you a shot of dope. I've reduced *luck* to a chemical formula! Now roll up your sleeve, Elmer, and I'll demonstrate."

But right there Elmer drew the line. The guinea pig decided to emulate the worm that turned. It wasn't that he was afraid that Enoch's mixture wouldn't work—he was afraid it would, and I've already mentioned that Elmer had no desire to be a superman. And he told Higgins so, told him as respectfully as possible, but he told him.

"Heh!" the old man snorted again. "Still scared, eh? You never did have the sense the Lord calculated to put into a goose. Here I give you the chance of a lifetime to get fame *and* fortune; and you muff it. All right, I'll show you what you're missiing, by ginger! I'll take it, myself!" And without any more ado, he rolled up his sleeve, right there at the supper table, and taking a hypodermic case out of his pocket, prepared and injected into his arm a shot of that goo which he had mixed up.

Elmer watched him for a while, nervously, but nothing happened. After a while, Higgins arose and started for the library. Elmer started obediently to follow, but the old man said testily, I don't need you no more tonight, Elmer. You and Laura get out of here and go to a picture show or someplace."

Elmer was pretty surprised. He'd never heard an order like that from old Enoch before. He hesitated a while, halfway suspecting that the drug had had some deleterious effect on Enoch's mind. But the old man sat down and picked up a magazine and proceeded to finish his cigar, quite naturally. So Elmer called to Laura, and they got out of the house before the old man could change his mind.

Next day, old Enoch worked in a vague, abstracted manner all morning, and when noon arrived, he asked Elmer to go to lunch with him. He pushed down his food in the usual silent manner, and when it was over, he leaned back and said, "Now, Elmer, I want you to tell me the truth; and don't try to hedge, or to lie out of it. Did you ever play the races?"

Elmer was relieved. He could truthfully say that he had never played the races in his life. But to his surprise, Enoch was disappointed again.

"Honest, Elmer," he grumbled. "You don't seem to be good for anything. You haven't even got a good constructive *vice.*"

Nevertheless, he continued to quiz the boy, and pretty soon it developed that even Elmer's ignorance wasn't as great as Enoch's. Elmer had read a thing or two about racing, and had heard this and that from his friends, and the upshot of the thing was that they took the afternoon off and went

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to the race track. Elmer was sure that it was that serum that had put this idea into Enoch's head, and he was beginning to wonder how it was coming out.

WELL, he soon found out.

For Enoch looked the horses over as they paraded for the first race, and put a bet of two dollars on *Haddock*. *Haddock* paid six and a half dollars for two. Enoch bet the eight and a half on *Peasant Gal* in the second, and had forty-one dollars and sixty-eight cents at the end of the race. Forty dollars of that went on *Stillwell* in the third; *Stillwell* was a long shot and Enoch cashed in his tickets for four hundred dollars!

Elmer felt sure he ought to be satisfied then, but no! He was at the window for the fourth race, sinking the whole roll on *Whistler*. He had nine hundred dollars at the end of that race, and finished the day with a profit of twenty-seven hundred and twenty dollars!

And *that* was only the beginning. You can imagine the effect that streak of luck had on old Enoch. If he was cocky and overbearing before, he became impossible now. He was *right*, and he knew it, and you couldn't tell him otherwise. And the worst of it was, he *was* right. Just you disagree with Enoch Higgins, and you could depend on it, you'd be proved wrong. His least guess would turn out to be fact, every time.

For instance, he took Laura and Elmer to supper one night at a hotel in town, and on the way back, he insisted on walking. Halfway home, he decided that they must take a short cut through a certain alley, and dragged the two with him in spite of their protestations. And about a hundred yards from the street, he suddenly ejaculated. that "Heh!" of his and stooped over and picked up two neatly folded twenty dollar bills!

Another time, on the way home from the picture house, he suddenly decided to cut up through Jay Street, instead of going, as usual, down Martin. And the next day he showed Elmer an item in the paper which told of a successful hold-up which had been perpetrated on Martin Street at just about the time they were avoiding it.

Day by day, Enoch's fortune was increasing. He hardly let a day go by without going to the races, and his winnings must have averaged about a thousand dollars a day! After a week or two, the hangers-on at the track began to notice and whenever Enoch showed up at a window, the place was mobbed by men trying to get bets down on whatever horse Enoch favored. Of course, that interfered with the odds, and Enoch's profits began to drop off. By this time he was crowding his luck, and he wasn't satisfied with a day's winnings if they didn't run up into the hundreds of dollars. So he began to look around for some other way of gambling.

One day he asked Elmer about gambling houses, but that was the one thing in the world that Elmer knew less about than horse racing. But Higgins found out somehow, for the next evening he told Elmer to come along with him, and, calling a taxi: "Drive me to that place you told me about, Bert," he instructed the driver; and half an hour later, Elmer was amazed to find himself entering that almost legendary gambling casino, the Gilbert Arms.

If you've ever been to our town, you've heard of the Gilbert Arms. It was a swanky resort hotel in the early twenties, but first bankruptcy and then prohibition and bootleggers got hold of it, and at last it evolved into one of those shady roadhouses where anything can happen and usually does.

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But old Enoch had tasted success in the gambling game and couldn't be stopped. Ordinarily, he was of a type that would have been as chary of visiting the place as Elmer, but with the luck he was having, he was convinced that none of the more or less sinister things that occasionally happened to Gilbert Arms visitors could happen to him.

SO HE barged into the Gilbert Arms, and after a talk with the head waiter, he was escorted into the famous Big Back Room. He was at the roulette table five minutes after he entered. He bought chips, stacked a hundred dollars on the red nine, and as the ball came to a stop, raked in his winnings with a smile.

Next he played the black twenty, and won again. Several people looked at him curiously. Still smiling, he played fifty on the black four.

Up to now, Elmer had tagged along behind him, silent and wondering. He didn't know why the old man had dragged him along in the first place. And he had been too full of wonder to say or do anything, for this was a new world to Elmer. But now it suddenly dawned on him that if he followed Enoch, he might get a little of the gravy, too.

So he peeled a five dollar bill off of his rather slim roll and put it on the black four, too. The wheel spun, slowed and stopped—in the red sixteen!

Enoch smiled happily, stepped aside and murmured to the boy, "I should have told you, Elmer. I lose once in a while so they won't get suspicious. Heh!"

But Elmer was cured right then. He bet no more. He more than half suspected that Enoch had had a hunch that he was going to bet, and had lost for just that reason.

But if Elmer was cured, not so with Enoch. He had only started. By one o'clock, he had broken the bank. The manager came, was very polite and very sorry that he was out of funds. He had felt sure, he said, that thirty-five thousand would see him through the night. Mr. Higgins' luck was without precedent. But if Mr. Higgins would come back again, he'd try to show him a little better entertainment.

Enoch grinned sardonically and agreed to come back soon—very soon. They left, and Enoch led Elmer around to the back of the building, and across the fields for a mile or more. When they finally emerged on a road, there was Enoch's car where he had parked it earlier in the day.

"I'm wise to that gentry, Elmer!" he snorted, when the boy demanded an explanation. "I've a hunch that there's a bunch of hoodlums waiting somewhere along the road right now, figuring on getting this money back. But, by ginger, they'll have to go some to get it away from 'Lucky' Higgins."

NOW, anybody would have thought that cleaning up a fortune like that would have satisfied Enoch. But no, he was ready to tackle the Gilbert Arms again, the very next night. And again he asked Elmer to go with him. I don't know why he was so interested in taking the boy along with him. Either he had gotten used to him or he just dragged him along to show him what he had missed by not submitting to Enoch's experiments.

Anyway, he asked Elmer to go along; and, instead of dissembling, instead of telling him some cock and bull story that would have made Enoch order him to stay home, Elmer told him that he thought it would be a pretty dangerous thing to try to tackle those jackals two nights in a row. But Elmer's objection

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not only made Enoch more determined than ever, but made him determined to take Elmer along.

So off to the roadhouse they went, and, of course, by midnight, old Higgins had broken the bank again. The manager (who, by the way, was none other than the notorious "Budge" Radcliffe) came to Enoch, all apologies, and asked him if he would come to the office. He had no money in the house, Enoch had broken all records for continuous winning, but he had a proposition to make that he felt sure would interest one of Enoch's sporting nature.

Enoch swelled up like a pouter pigeon at the man's suave flattery, but Elmer felt cold right down to the bottom of his shoes. Radcliffe's record was clean enough, he'd never been caught or convicted of any crime; but Radcliffe's reputation was something else again. Rumor had connected him with every crooked deal that had been pulled in the county in the last five years. And Elmer had a gruesome hunch that once they entered Radcliffe's office, their chances of getting out would be about the same as that of the fly that visited the well-known spider. But Enoch arose and followed the manager, and when he saw Elmer lagging behind, he beckoned him imperiously to follow. And Elmer, perforce, followed; for even though he had little faith in his ability to protect the old man, he felt that it would be out of place to leave him alone to his doom.

Once in the office, sure enough, they were covered with revolvers in the hands of three very determined and very serious young men. The manager, debonair as ever, addressed Enoch.

"I suppose you realize, Mr. Higgins, that I'm not in this business for my health," he started off. "And I'm no philanthropist, either. Now, you've taken about seventy thousand dollars from me in two days, and I'd be a fool if I let you get away with that.

"But—" he stopped long enough to light a cigarette and to emphasize what he was about to say. "I looked you up today, and I've found out that you are one of these scientist guys. I put two and two together, and I've figured out that you have a system. I've heard of hundreds of systems in my life and none I ever heard of worked; but I'd be a fool not to realize that you've got one that does.

"So-o-o—you'll be a good fellow and let me in on your system, and I'll be a good fellow and let you get away with the seventy Gs you've took me for. Ain't I right?"

Elmer would have sold his chances of getting out of there alive for a thin dime when he heard Enoch's answer. Enoch said, as cool and cocky as if he'd been talking to Elmer in his own dining room, "No, Mr. Radcliffe, you're not right!"

Elmer really began to tremble and was just about to begin protesting when it dawned on him that Enoch wouldn't have taken such a cocky attitude if he didn't have some kind of hunch that everything would come out all right. So he kept quiet and was just beginning to bless the Higgins luck when it dawned on him that it was the *Higgins* luck he was counting on, and that it couldn't be expected to cover him, at all. So he began to tremble all over again.

AS FOR Radcliffe, when he heard Enoch, he could hardly believe his ears. There was Enoch, not a particularly hard looking old fellow, and there were three of the toughest hotshots in town holding him down with big wicked pistols, and he was calmly

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refusing to do as he was told. For a minute, Radcliffe was speechless. If it had been merely the getting of his money back, he'd probably have let Enoch and Elmer both have it right then and there; but Radcliffe had watched Enoch's play all evening and he was positive that Enoch had a workable system that was worth far more to him than the money Enoch had won.

So at last he said, "Well, I'll give you till morning to think it over." Then he got up and said to one of the gunmen, "Hold 'em both, in the little room upstairs. And don't let that young one get around you. Remember, he knows too much, and he ain't worth nothing, either."

Then he and the others went out of the room and the remaining gangster motioned them out of the other door.

"You boys is going upstairs and think this over," he said. "And don't try any funny stuff, 'cause I get excited awful easy, see?"

They marched upstairs, entered one of the rooms and sat down. Enoch said nothing and Elmer followed his example. The gangster sat in one of the overstuffed chairs and toyed with his revolver.

An hour passed. Elmer was nervous, sweating profusely. Enoch yawned once or twice.

Another hour passed. It was well after two.

Elmer was showing signs of approaching nervous prostration. The gangster now began to show signs of being nervous, too. Enoch took a pair of dice out of his pocket and began toying with them. Their captor's face lit up, he cleared his throat, and: "I didn't know you had any bones witcha," he said, eagerly. "What about a game, huh? A nice, friendly little game, quiet-like, huh?"

Enoch agreed, and Elmer sighed the grand-daddy of all sighs, and sank into a chair. The tension had broken at last and Enoch's luck had begun to function again, Elmer was sure.

The game lasted fifteen minutes and at the end of that time, the gangster's pockets were bare. He sighed and got up from the floor.

"I thought it would last longer than that," he said, disgruntled. "Now what'll we do to pass the time?"

"I'll tell you what," said Enoch, in a seemingly speculative manner. "I'll roll a hundred dollars against one of the bullets in your gun. Just to keep the game going, heh?"

The sucker hesitated, and Enoch started to pick up his winnings, unconcernedly. It was more than the other could stand;—he stepped away from us, broke his gun quickly and took out one of the cartridges. He came back, and in a minute or two, Enoch owned the bullet.

He offered to shoot another hundred and the first bullet for a second. But the sucker was getting wise and hesitated a good ten minutes before agreeing.

Enoch won the second bullet. Then he offered to shoot for the third.

The thug refused. Enoch snorted that famous contemptuous snort of his and settled down into his chair, fiddling suggestively with his dice. The thug reddened and lost his temper, but he didn't give in. He stubbornly refused to bet another bullet, but he sat there and eyed the cubes in Enoch's hand as if he were a bird and they were one of those mythical hypnotic snakes.

Enoch laughed. "What's the matter," he barked. "You act as if you were taking a chance. *I'm* the one that takes the chances. Even if you lost, you'd still have the gun and three more bullets, wouldn't you?"

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THE gangster scowled, then his face brightened suddenly into a smile.

"Why, sure," he said. "Sure I have. Yeah, that's right. I still got three bullets, and that luck of yours can't last forever. *Okeh!* One more bullet against all you've won from me and a century besides. Are you on?"

He picked up the dice as he spoke, but Enoch covered his hand. "I ain't playing blind, son," the old man snarled. "Lay that bullet down there!" The gangster affected to sneer at this "piker's trick," but he stepped aside, broke his gun and laid the third bullet down on the floor. Then he picked up the dice, tossed them—*and they came up seven!*

Elmer was all fixed to sigh with relief, but his sigh changed to a gasp of alarm. It looked as if Enoch's luck had deserted him. But Elmer still wasn't fully aware of the devious and mysterious ways of that weird power. Before his gasp of alarm was half over, Enoch had jumped on the hoodlum (who had stooped to pick up his winnings), and the old man was shouting, "Come on, Elmer. Help me get him. I gotta hunch he only had three bullets in that gun!"

From his long hours of worry and nervous fright, Elmer was as tense as a guy-wire; and at Higgins' cry, he blew up like a dropped blunderbuss. It was a downright pleasure to throw himself on that thug and pound him and pound him, unmercifully. Elmer never did know whether the thug offered any resistance or not; all he remembered afterward was that Enoch and he sort of swelled up and flowed over the mug; and several minutes after, he was lying on the floor and Elmer and Enoch were standing over him and shaking hands and laughing fit to kill.

Then they tied him up, and Enoch took his revolver and reloaded it, and they cautiously left the room. It was dark in the hallway, and for a while, they searched in vain for the stairs. They found a flight at last, but they were a narrow flight that led, apparently, directly into the manager's office. And apparently the gang hadn't left or gone to sleep yet, in spite of the fact that it was nearly three o'clock, for a light came from under the door and the voices of Radcliffe and the others came through it.

Enoch stopped for a moment and stared at the door, speculatively. Then, in spite of the fact that Elmer was pulling at his sleeve and whispering that they better go back upstairs and hunt for another exit, he unlatched the door softly and, kicking it open, he stepped in quickly and covered the three men inside with his weapon.

Radcliffe snarled and leaped to his feet, but Enoch motioned him sternly down again. "Take it easy, Radcliffe," he snapped. "I got the upper hand now, and, by ginger, I can hold it. Besides, I'm here to do you a favor, before I go. One of your men is two-timing you, and I think you ought to know it. That rat there," he pointed, "if you search him, I've a hunch you'll find a letter that will prove what I say."

As he spoke, he was edging gradually around the men and working his way to the door opposite. And Elmer was hugging as close to him as he knew how. The crook whom he accused got white as a sheet, but he managed to smile scornfully and to spit with an air of braggadocio.

"Ain't dat a joke," he snarled. "If you didn't have me covered, I'd smash your ugly mug fer dat crack. Why, me and Budge is buddies. He'd trust me anywhere, wouldn't you, Budge?"

"I sure would," Radcliffe answered softly. "I'd trust you anywhere, Paoli.

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And just to show him how wrong he is, turn out your pockets and show him what you've got there."

Paoli turned, if possible, just a little paler.

"Aw, gee, Budge—" he started to protest; but Radcliffe's soft tones turned to a snarl of: "Turn out them dam' pockets!"

THEN, suddenly, Paoli and one of the others dropped behind the table at which they stood, and Radcliffe had a revolver in his hand—and already it was smoking and the echoes of a shot were dying away, and Enoch was pushing Elmer through the door and into a hallway.

"I had a hunch about that letter," he panted as they ran down the hall and into the main dining room of the place. "Looks as if my hunches were still working, eh, Elmer?"

From the sound of shots that still came from the office, it looked as if he were right. As the two left the building, though, the shots died away, and Elmer realized that one group or the other had won the fight. And whichever side won, it was a pretty sure bet that they'd be hunting the ones that had started it all. Indeed, almost immediately, a jumble of shouted commands came distantly to them, and Elmer would have sworn that there was something shouted about the "old man and the kid."

They sped down the tree-lined avenue that led from the state highway to the house, making no attempt to get their machine which was parked on the side of the house. Both instinctively knew that they wouldn't have time to reach the car and set it in motion. So they ran, hoping that they'd find some place of concealment before the remains of the mob managed to organize a pursuit and try to find them.

Now, the chances are that Radcliffe and his men who still survived were less interested in capturing or harming Enoch and Elmer than they were in putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the terrible mess of things that had resulted from crossing old Enoch. Whether that is so or not, the fact remains that they rushed from the house and, instead of pursuing the fugitives, they went at once to the garage and in a moment or two, a big Cadillac swept out and down the road to the highway.

They didn't put the lights on, and so they were pretty close to Elmer and Enoch before those two realized that the noise they heard was a car bearing down on them. They probably thought it was a car on the highway, until Elmer, glancing back, saw the huge black mass descending on them out of the lesser gloom. He shouted a warning and leaped for the protection of the trees on the side of the road and then turned to see if Enoch was safe. To his horror, he saw Enoch, who had rushed for the other side of the road, turn suddenly and rush back, straight into the path of the oncoming juggernaut. He heard a thump and covered his eyes, he heard a terrible grunt from Enoch and a gleeful cry: "You got the old one, Budge," from the car. Then the sound of a motor rapidly dying away, and Elmer took his hands from his face to look into the gloom of the night, and wonder miserably if Enoch was dead or only mortally wounded.

WELL, I guess that's the climax of the story. There's no use of telling what happened in the next few hours. Briefly, Elmer stood and wrung his hands for ten minutes that seemed like hours, and then, afraid to move old Enoch for fear he'd add to his injuries, he went back to the garage to get the

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car, found a telephone there and called a hospital. They came and got Enoch, took him to the hospital and it was four months before he got out.

Of course, the wealth that Enoch had amassed stood him in good stead, then. He could afford to have, and did have, the best and most famous surgeon in the country. The doctor was called from half way across the country, and came on a fast chartered plane. Of course, he had to operate, and he frankly said that he couldn't tell whether Enoch would live or not, until after the operation.

You can imagine Elmer's physical state, as he and Laura waited in the hospital for news of the operation. He walked the floor like a new father, trying to keep awake. The night before, he had sat up most of the time with Laura; the night before that, had been the night of the accident. Now, he was practically out on his feet. At last, after hours that seemed centuries, the doctor appeared. His eyes were glowing and Elmer knew, even before he spoke, that the operation was a successful one. But just how successful, he didn't know until the doctor spoke.

"Mr. Bidwell," he said. "Do you know if Mr. Higgins ever exhibited any queer traits, any neurotic tendencies or tendencies toward hysteria?"

"Gosh, no!" Elmer was shocked. "Just the opposite, I'd say, doctor."

"Did he ever take drugs of any sort?"

"No, not that I know of—" Elmer began, and then he thought of that dose of luck that Enoch had taken. After a moment's thought, he decided to tell, and unburdened himself of the whole story of Enoch Higgins' luck. To say the doctor was astounded was putting it mildly.

"Mr. Bidwell," he said. "I came out here to tell you that Enoch Higgins was the luckiest man I've ever seen in all my years of practice. I didn't imagine, of course, that his luck was artificial. But—well, now I don't know what to think. When I first looked at that broken skull of his, I noticed something, and when the time came to operate, I verified those suspicions. To be brief, Enoch Higgins had a small but well-developed cancer of the brain. Some things about it make it seem certain that it was artificially induced, probably by that drug he took. I removed it, and I can insure you there's no danger of its return.

"But if that accident hadn't happened when it did, the thing would have gotten beyond control in a few months and Enoch would more than likely have died of madness. He's the luckiest man I ever heard of!"

THE END

« FIRST U. S. PATENT »

EVER hear of Samuel Winslow? He was the recipient of the first patent ever issued in America. His invention was a chemical process to manufacture salt. Following is the very interesting original patent wording:

"A Generall Court of Elections, Held at Boston The 2th, 4th Mo., 1641.

Whereas Samu: Winslow hath made a pposition to this Court to furnish the countrey with salt at more easy rates than otherwise can bee had, & to make it by a meanes, & way, wch hitherto hath not bene discovred. It is therefore ordered, that if the said Samu: shall wthin the space of one yeare, set upon the said worke, hee shall enjoy the same, to him & his assosiats, for the space of 10 yeares, so as it shall not bee lawfull to any other pson to make salt after the same way during the said years; pvided, nevrthelesse, that it shall bee lawfull for any pson to bring in any salt, or to make salt after any othr way dureing the said tearme./."

This patent was granted in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on April 2nd, 1641.

—*A. Morris.*

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The Little Man Who

Everybody backs away when I enter, and I wonder why

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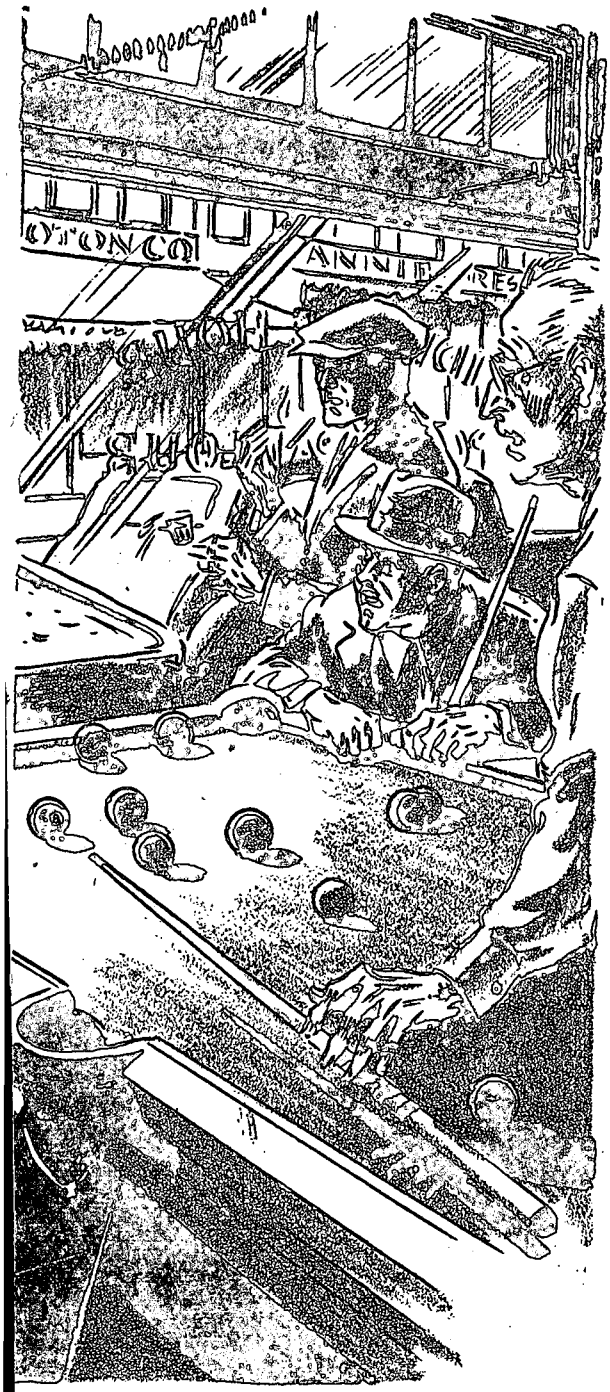
Wasn't All There

by
ROBERT BLOCH



When Lefty Feep put on that coat, he let himself in for a lot of trouble because it was a coat that was part of a suit of invisibility. And being half invisible isn't practical

☆

I WALKED into Jack's Shack accompanied by a terrific appetite. It tugged me toward a table with a haste not to be denied. I didn't notice the thin and melancholy figure in the booth until a thin and melancholy arm grabbed my coat tails.

"Hey!" said a voice, plaintively.

"Why, Lefty Feep! I didn't see you when I came in."

A grimace of positive horror crossed Mr. Feep's face, together with half of the sandwich he was eating.

"Don't say that," he pleaded.

"But I really didn't notice you."

Feep trembled violently.

"Please put a collar on that kind of holler," he begged. "It makes me queasy but uneasy when you say you do not see me."

"Oh, I see you now all right."

"That's better." Feep pushed a relieved smile through the sandwich lettuce and waved me to a seat opposite

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him. "Now you're cooking with sterno."

I gave my order and sank back in my chair.

"Well, Lefty, what's new? Haven't seen hide nor hair of you for a few days."

"Don't say it that way!" Feep grated.

"What's biting you?"

"The finance company," Lefty Feep replied. "But that is neither here nor there. It is this stuff about not seeing me that disturbs and perturbs."

I began to feel a question coming on. I struggled to resist, but it was no use.

"What's the reason you're so upset when I mention not seeing you?"

Feep wiggled his ears impressively.

"Do you really want to know?" he asked.

"No. But you're going to tell me, anyway."

"Seeing you are so inquisitive," said Lefty Feep, "I suppose there is nothing else I can do but spill it. The whole thing starts out when I get tangled up with this Gorgonzola."

"The cheese?" I inquired.

"No—the magician," Feep replied.

Waving a stalk of celery in mysterious rhythm, Lefty Feep hunched forward and began his story.

I KNOW this Great Gorgonzola for many a year. In fact, I know him when he is just plain Eddie Klotz, doing a vaudeville act. Then he gets a magic show of his own, and pretty soon he calls himself the Great Gorgonzola and becomes tops in the sleight-of-hand racket.

I see his latest show just recently, and it is only a couple of days later that I run into him in front of a brass rail I happen to be standing on.

I give him the old once-over, because he is dressed very stylish, like a corpse, and he has a dance-floor mustache—full of wax. Then I recognize him.

"Well, if it isn't the Great Gorgonzola," I yap. "How are tricks in the magic game?"

"Fair," he tells me. "The legerdemain is all right, but the prestidigitation is lousy."

"I am sorry to hear that," I reply. "But by the way, as one magician to another—who is that lady I saw you in half with last night?"

"That is no lady, that is my wife," he comes back, with a straight puss. "She is my assistant in the show we are doing. How do you like it?"

"Very nice," I tell him. "Strictly uptown. I figure I will go again this week."

He shakes his head.

"The show closed last night," he informs me. "I have a little business to attend to the rest of this week, so I close up and get ready to leave town. But I hate to do it."

"Why?"

"Do you ever hear of my rival?"

"Rival?"

"Yes," he sneers. "Gallstone the Magician."

"What's with him?"

"My wife, mostly," says Gorgonzola, looking very sad. "Gallstone is nothing but a bushy-haired wolf. He is making passes at my wife, and not just to practise his hypnotism, either."

"That is a tough break," I agree. "But why do you not give him a tough break too—say, his neck, for instance?"

"An excellent idea," Gorgonzola tells me. "But I simply must leave on this business trip. Meanwhile this Gallstone will be hanging around my wife, trying to insinuate himself with her."

"That is a lousy thing to do," I pronounce. "There is nothing I hate worse than an insinuator. Isn't there a law?"

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"You do not seem to understand me," says Gorgonzola. "He wants to worm something out of her."

"That is even worse."

"I mean, Gallstone is trying to get my wife to give away the secrets of my new magical effects for the next season's show. He wants her to tell him my new tricks."

"Aha! Then why don't you take your wife with you?"

"That's out. Private business, very important and just a little dangerous. I'm leaving her out at the house. Futzi will have to take care of her."

"Futzi?"

"My houseboy," Gorgonzola explains. "He's a Filipino." Then he slaps his hand on the bar. "Say, there's an idea. Listen, Feep—why can't you come out to the house and stay there this next three days? It would solve everything if you'd keep your eyes open."

"I AM sorry," I tell him. "But it is necessary for me to stay downtown and look after my interests."

"You mean those lousy $2 horse-bets?"

"Well, if you choose to put it that way."

"But you can come down every day anyway. Just so you are on hand if this Gallstone shows up. It means a lot to me, Lefty—more than I can tell you now."

"All right," I agree. "When do I go, and where?"

"Today," Gorgonzola tells me. "Here's what I'll do—I'll go home, pack, and leave. Then I'll have Futzi come around and call for you with the car. You can carry your things easier that way."

"What things?" I reply, very bitterly. "One toothbrush and a pair of socks is not exactly a load."

"Nevertheless, Futzi will call for you. He'll bring the keys and everything. Expect him at your place around two. And thanks a million."

With that, Gorgonzola breezes out and I go home and dry out that pair of socks. I am just shredding the bristles on my toothbrush when the doorbell rings.

I yank it open, careful, and look out into the hall. I do not see anybody. Then I glance down. Somewhere about a few feet from the floor is a little guy with a face like yellow jaundice.

This face is all plastered up in a big grin with the teeth sticking out like they want to use my toothbrush.

The little yellow guy bows up and down.

"Honorable Feep?" he says.

I give him the nod.

"Honorable Feep, honorable Gorgonzola say for me to carry you to honorable house. Myself, humble Futzi, am yours truly to command."

This is Filipino double-talk meaning I am going to Gorgonzola's dump with him.

So I grab my handclasp—it is so small, you can hardly call it a grip—and close the door.

"O.K.," I tell this Futzi. "Lead the way, my Japanese sandman."

HE TURNS around and gives me an un-laundered look.

"Me Filipino boy, not Japanzee," he hisses. "I do not enjoy it when you stick amusement at me."

"You mean poke fun at you?" I ask.

"Correctly. If I one of those Japanzees I go out commit hootchiekootchie."

"You mean hotsytotsy?"

"No, hocus-pocus."

Then I get it. "You mean harikari."

"No. Hocus-pocus. I kill myself with magician's knife."

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This kind of talk is hard to follow, and so is this guy's driving. We skid through traffic in Gorgonzola's car, and a dozen times I think we are morgue-meat, but little Futzi just sings away at the wheel. Then I decide to take advantage of the chance to find out a few things about the setup I am heading into.

"Does Mrs. Gorgonzola expect me?"

"Of coarsely. She expectorate you right away. Mr. Gorgonzola he tell her you coming down on week end and then he take it on the sheep."

"On the lam, you mean."

"Honorable correction noted. And here we arrive."

We pull into the driveway of a two-story bungalow.

"What kind of woman is Mrs. Gorgonzola?" I ask, just to be on the safe side.

"She very female person," Futzi answers. "But so sorry. Too skinny for suiting me. Not too skinny for honorable Gallstone though. He all the time dangle around like ants in the pants."

"You mean snake in the grass."

"Surely. Shrubbery serpent, that honorable skunk. Mr. Gorgonzola say if you catch Gallstone hanging around you cut his throat from ear to there."

We get out and head for the door. Futzi rings, grinning at me.

"Mrs. Gorgonzola arrive now," he says.

Sure enough, the door opens.

"Slide in," Futzi suggests.

"Not me!" I yelp. I do not like what is standing in the doorway. I dislike it so much my knees begin to knock it.

"Listen, my fine Filipino friend," I whisper. "You tell me Mrs. Gorgonzola is thin, but you do not tell me she is *that* thin."

Because the thing that opens the door is nothing else than a white, grinning skeleton!

"SQUEEZE yourself together," Futzi giggles. "This is not Mrs. Gorgonzola. Is just a trick. Gorgonzola he very tricky honorable baby, you betcha! This just harmless bones."

Sure enough, I see the skeleton is attached to the doorpost. We edge inside.

"Now here are keys to honorable house," Futzi tells me in the hall. "Especially keys to Mr. Gorgonzola's bedroom. He hides tricks up there so nobody steals. He say you take nice care of these, so Gallstone cannot stick honorable schnozzola into secret business."

I pocket the keys and then I hear somebody coming.

"So there you are," snaps a voice. Futzi turns around.

"Honorable Mrs., allow me to gift to you honorable Feep, Lefty, Esq. He is here to sit down on week end."

Mrs. Gorgonzola gives me the old eye, and a very pretty eye it is too, under all that mascara and pencil work. She is a tall, thin damsel with drug-store-blonde hair. I hold out my hand, but she must think I have a bad case of tattle-tale gray, because she does not take it. Instead she hands me a stuffed fish look.

"My husband tells me you're going to be here until he gets back," she freezes.

"I hope it does not put you out," I tell her.

"Oh, it's perfectly all right, I suppose. Futzi, show Mr. Feep to his room. Dinner's at seven. Now, if you'll pardon me, I must go lock myself in a trunk."

"What kind of talk is that?" I ask Futzi, when we walk upstairs.

"Straight from elbow talk," he says. "Mrs. Gorgonzola always lock herself in trunk or safe or something. She makes practise for magic act. What

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you call, escape artist?"

"I see."

When I get into Gorgonzola's room upstairs, I see a lot more. The place is filled with trunks and boxes and cases, and when I hang my coat in the closet I find still more. There are decks of cards under the bed, and artificial flowers and flags and wands. I head for the bath to wash my hands and Futzi leaps for the door ahead of me.

"Wait!" he hollers. "You wish to release rabbits?"

"Rabbits?"

"Honorable Gorgonzola keeps rabbits in bath. Bathtub full of lettuce, you notice."

SURE enough, the place is full of bunnies. I start to wash, and the lop-ears flop around and jump up on me, while Futzi tries to shoo them off.

"Ow!" I mention, with my eyes full of soap, because a rabbit jumps onto the washbowl and starts tickling my stomach. But it is too late for me to do anything, and I get my coat splashed up plenty.

"Do not spend any attention to that," Futzi grins. "I send honorable coat to honorable cleaners."

"Fie upon that noise," I bark. "If I do not get back downtown this afternoon I am going to the cleaners myself. I have to place a bet on a pet, and I cannot run down there in my shirtsleeves. The snappy dressers at the pool hall will laugh at me."

"Why not wear coat of Mr. Gorgonzola?" Futzi suggests. "He got plenty clothes in closet. Enough for whole nudist colony, I gamble you."

This seems to be an idea. After Futzi takes my wet coat away and tells me I can use the car to drive down, I go to the big bedroom closet and start looking around.

The place is full of magic paraphrenalia like I say, but there do not seem to be any clothes hanging there at all, except costumes. I do not wish to wear a turban or a Chinese kimono, and I am about ready to give up when I see this trunk.

It is a great big iron chest locked away at the bottom of the closet, and I pull it out and see that it is closed very tight indeed. For a minute I give up, because I do not carry any nitroglycerine on my person for many years. Then I remember the keys Futzi gives me.

Sure enough, the first key I try unlocks the trunk. It is filled with mirrors and folding stuff and glass balls —and I realize this must be the trunk full of new tricks that Gorgonzola is so anxious for me to watch over.

But there at one side is just what I am looking for—a nice tuxedo. There is a coat, a vest, a pair of pants, and a top hat to match.

I merely remove the coat and slip it on for size. It fits pretty well and I am just going to yank on the trousers when I look at the clock and see I must beat it downtown in a hurry if I wish to catch the fifth race.

So I just keep my old trousers and wear Gorgonzola's coat. I run down the hall and out into the yard, climb into the car, and make like crazy.

Ten minutes later I am entering Gorilla Gabface's pool palace. It is here that I make my modest investments on the races from time to time.

There are quite a bunch of bananas standing around phoning in their wagers, and big fat Gorilla Gabface is making book. When I rush in, they turn around and stare.

Now I admit it is unusual for me to wear a tuxedo coat and checked trousers. Such a spectacle is worth a stare any day of the week. But the kind of look I get from the personalities around the phone is quite queer indeed. And

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there is a very quaint silence along with it.

I RUSH up to Gorilla Gabface and hold up my hand. He is standing there with his mouth open and his tongue hanging out a mile, and when I come close he sort of shudders and puts his hands over his eyes.

"No!" he gasps. "No—no!"

"What's the matter, you big ape?" I ask, kindly. "You look like you never see me before in your life."

"I don't!" he gasps. "And if I never see you again I am very satisfied."

"But you know me. I'm Lefty Feep!"

Gorilla moans a little.

"The face is familiar," he groans. "And so are the trousers. But what happens to the rest of you?"

"Nothing at all," I tell him. "I merely borrow this tuxedo coat to wear here."

"What tuxedo coat?" Gabface asks. "I don't see any."

"Then what do you think I'm wearing?"

"I don't know." Gorilla is sweating. He backs further away. "From the looks of you, you should be wearing a shroud. I don't know what holds your neck up."

"Are you giving me the rib?" I ask.

"No—you're giving me the shivers," he says. "Coming in here like that; just a face and a pair of pants underneath. What happens to the rest of you?"

He pulls me along the wall by the seat of my trousers, very careful, until I am facing a mirror.

"Tell me what you see," he whispers.

I look, and then it is my turn to gasp.

Because in the mirror I see a pair of pants, a neck, and a head. There is nothing in between. I am cut off at the hips, and my head and neck are floating around about three feet above in the empty air!

"You must do a lot of betting in the first races today," Gorilla whispers. "I hear of guys losing their shirts on the horses before, but you go ahead and lose your whole torso!"

I just stand there. Looking down, I can see my tuxedo coat very plain. But it does not show in the mirror and it is not visible to anybody else.

"You say you borrow that coat?" one of the specimens at the phone inquires.

"Yes, I find it in a closet."

"Maybe the thing is full of moths," he suggests.

"Very hungry moths," Gorilla chimes in. "So hungry they not only eat up the coat but your chest and arms, too."

I just stare at the mirror. Because now I think I know what happens. I look around for clothes in a trunk where Gorgonzola keeps his magic tricks and I get a trick coat. One that makes me invisible.

Just to prove it, I take the coat off. And sure enough, I am all right again. I stand there in my shirtsleeves looking foolish, but not so foolish as the rest of these mugs.

"How do you do it?" Gabface asks me.

"It is a magician's coat," I admit.

"Well, do not put it back on," he begs. "You give us all quite a shock with that trick. For a minute I think you must be suffering from an overdose of vanishing cream."

"NEVER mind that," I snap. "I want to place a wager in the fifth race at Santa Anita. On Bing Crosby's horse."

"You are too late," Gorilla tells me. "It just finishes."

I let out an unkind remark. "Curse this coat business," I suggest. "It spoils a sure 15-1 shot for me."

"Cheer up," says Gabface. "You

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are lucky you do not make the bet, because you lose anyway."

"How come?"

"Well, Bing Crosby's horse is disqualified at the post, so Crosby runs the race himself instead. And loses."

This cheers me up a little, and so I take my leave and go back to Gorgonzola's house for supper. I am very careful not to wear this coat in the car, because if I do so it will look like the jallopy has no driver in it.

Besides, I can not get used to the idea of what I see when I look in the mirror. Being invisible is a very funny feeling, and every time I remember it I have to close my eyes and shudder.

The last time I do so I am just ready to park. And I run smack into the back of a big Packard.

"Aha!" yells a voice from inside. "Watch where you're going, you hoodlum!"

I look around to see what kind of uncouth person he is talking to, and then I realize the remark is made to me. More and over, the owner of the voice jumps out of the Packard and climbs up to the running board. He is waving one hand in front of my face and he does not have any flag in it, either. Just a big fist.

"I am sorry," I say. "I must be driving with my eyes closed."

"That is the way you will drive for a long time, you oaf," he says. "Because I am going to black both eyes for you."

I notice he is a big, beefy fellow with a red face and a big shock of bushy hair that stands out from his head like a dust mop.

"Can't we talk this over?" I suggest.

One big arm reaches in and grabs me. He lifts me out of the car and holds me up by the neck.

"The only thing I will talk over is your dead body," he snarls. "You smash both my rear fenders and that is what I am going to do to you."

Just then the front door opens and Mrs. Gorgonzola runs out. She smiles at the big bushy-haired specimen.

"Why Mr. Gallstone, you've arrived for dinner," she simpers. "I see you and Mr. Feep already know each other."

"Yes," I gasp. "I bump into him just now coming in."

"Mr. Feep is a house-guest," says Mrs. Gorgonzola.

"So?" Gallstone drops me down to my feet and takes his paw off my collar. "I am pleased to meet you," he snarls, and holds out his hand. I take it, and he nearly breaks my fingers off at the joints.

"So you are Gallstone the Magician," I manage to get out. "Gorgonzola tells me a lot about you."

"He does, huh? Well—he can't prove it." Gallstone sneers. Then he turns to Mrs. Gorgonzola and gives her a look at his big teeth.

"I hear your husband is away," he says.

"That's right."

"Too bad. Ha-ha!"

"Yes, isn't it, tee-hee!" cracks Mrs. Gorgonzola.

SO RIGHT away I figure it is one of those things. I get out of the way to avoid being hit by any flying mush they are slinging at each other.

Then Futzi sticks his head around the door.

"Dinner is swerved!" he yells. "Rush to put on honorable food-sack."

Mrs. Gorgonzola turns to me. "When you left, I didn't think you'd be back for dinner," she says. "So—"

I catch on to this, also.

"I eat downtown," I lie. "I will just go up to my room, if you don't mind. You two go right ahead and entertain

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each other. If you don't mind, of course."

Gallstone grins and now I know what he reminds me of with his bushy hair. A wolf. It is like Gorgonzola says. And now he is sneaking around Gorgonzola's wife.

I just go upstairs but already I have an idea in the old noggin. When I get into the room I make for the trunk and pull out the rest of the tuxedo, also the top hat. I put these on, and then go for the mirror.

For a minute I am afraid to look. I stare down at my coat and pants. They are very ordinary-looking to me, and I can see them very plainly. So naturally I know I must be able to see them in the mirror.

But when I do look in the mirror, there is nothing. Nothing at all. The coatsleeves come down over my hands and the pants cuffs cover my shoes, and the top-hat pulls down over my face —all this I know, but I do not see it in the mirror. The mirror is blank. Absolutely blank.

I pull off the hat. Then I see my head hanging in empty space. This looks worse, so I put the hat back on, slow. And I am invisible again.

Maybe there is some new chemical in the cloth, or some fibre that does not reflect light. Whatever it is, Gorgonzola has an invisible suit, and I am wearing it. This is enough for me.

Because I have this plan. I do not like Gallstone the Magician and I promise to watch Gorgonzola's wife. So I decide to go ahead.

I wait awhile and then I sneak downstairs wearing the invisible suit. Sure enough, Gallstone and Mrs. Gorgonzola are at the supper table, flirting with each other.

When I slide in, he is showing off by juggling three water glasses in the air at once. She giggles and watches him and he smirks all over the place. Pretty soon he puts down the glasses and pulls out his napkin. A big rubber plant grows from underneath it.

"Oh, Mr. Gallstone, you are so clever," she says.

"Just call me Oscar," he says. And pulls a live snake out from the potatoes. "I'll bet your husband can't do this," he remarks.

"Oh—*him*," sniffs Mrs. Gorgonzola. "He doesn't do anything. Before we were married, he used to be so cute—always grabbing rabbits out of my neck and surprising me by turning coffee into champagne. Now he doesn't even juggle the dinner plates any more."

"Such neglect! Shameful!" says Gallstone. He reaches over and tweaks her ear. A gopher jumps out.

"You're wonderful, Oscar," she tells him.

"That's nothing at all to what I can do," boasts Gallstone. "Come into the living room."

"Why?"

"I want to show you some of my parlor tricks."

THEY go into the living room. Mrs. Gorgonzola grabs his arm. I follow right behind, but of course they can not see me at all.

"You ought to leave that clumsy oaf of a husband," Gallstone suggests. "A woman like you deserves only the best kind of thaumaturgy, to say nothing of a little gayety now and then."

"Oh—I couldn't," she says.

"Why not? What has your husband got that I haven't got? What if he does saw you in half? I've got a trick where I can saw you into four parts. Six, even. And if you'll join my act instead I'll promise not to stop until I can cut you into sixteen pieces."

"That would be thrilling," she blushes.

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"Why your husband doesn't even know how to stick knives into you in the basket trick," Gallstone sneers. "Me, I can use axes on you."

"You make it all sound so fascinating," she simpers, snuggling up against him.

"Tricks? Why I've got tricks Gorgonzola never even dreamed of," whispers Gallstone, grabbing her in a half-nelson and giving her the kind of look a rat has when he grabs a piece of cheese.

"I know what kind of tricks you have," I bust out. "And you can stick them back up your sleeve, Gallstone."

"What's that?" Mrs. Gorgonzola shrieks, jumping up.

Gallstone looks around.

"Huh?"

"That voice—it spoke to me out of empty air."

They stare but they do not see me, of course, even though I am standing right in front of them.

"You must be imagining things," says Gallstone, with a puzzled look.

"Ouch! I didn't imagine *that*," snaps Mrs. Gorgonzola.

Because I decide to pinch her in a likely spot at this moment, and do so, hard.

"What?" asks Gallstone.

"That!" shrieks the lady. "There—you did it again. You naughty boy."

"I didn't do anything."

"You pinched me."

"Where?"

"On the davenport here."

"How can I pinch you when you're holding both my hands?"

"Well somebody pinched me."

I stick my face down close.

"You'll get pinched again if you don't stop holding hands with that bushy-haired baboon," I mutter.

"Eeek—that voice again!" Mrs. Gorgonzola wails. "Don't tell me you didn't hear it this time, Oscar."

Gallstone is on the spot now. All at once he smiles.

"Oh, *that* voice," he says. "Just another little trick of mine your husband can't duplicate. That's a spirit. A ghost. I'm psychic, you know. I can call ghosts out of the empty air."

She gives him a sick calf look.

"Oh, how wonderful you are!" she says. They go into another clinch. I break this up by stepping on Gallstone's toes, hard. Then I let out a long groan. They jump apart fast.

"CUT out that romantic stuff, Goldilocks," I grate. "Or you'll be a ghost yourself in a couple of minutes."

"I don't think I'd like to live with such spirits," Mrs. Gorgonzola wails. "Oscar, make that voice go away."

Gallstone is plenty confused. But he stands up, and tries to smile.

"Listen, darling—once and for all, let's forget all these things. I want you to go away with me and join my act. That's what I've come to tell you. You and I can take your husband's new tricks with us and—"

Aha, that was it! He was after those tricks, just the way Gorgonzola warns me. I watch the two of them close.

"I'm not sure," Mrs. Gorgonzola flutters. "You must let me decide."

"No time for that. I'll prove to you that I'm a better magician than Gorgonzola any day. And then you must come with me."

"Well—"

"Come on. Name a trick your husband can't do and I'll do it for you right now."

"Let me see. Oh yes, that safe trick. You know that big iron safe he has. He tries to get out of it after it's locked and he just can't seem to master the combination."

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"Let me at it," Gallstone boasts. "Lead me to it. I'll show you."

"It's in the cellar," she says.

"Show me."

They go downstairs and I follow. I try to trip Gallstone on the stairs, but miss. And there we are in the cellar; the two standing in front of a big iron safe and me invisible next to them.

The safe is really a terrific box, big and heavy, with a huge lock on it. Gallstone looks at it and laughs.

"Why breaking that is like breaking a baby bank," he sneers. "I'll climb in and let you lock me up. In three minutes I'll be out again and we'll be off together. Is it a deal?"

Mrs. Gorgonzola blushes.

"Very well, Oscar," she says. "You have my consent. If you can break out of this safe I'll run away with you."

"Kiss me, darling," moos Gallstone. They clinch, but I stick my face in between and Gallstone kisses my neck. He blinks a little but breaks away. Then he wraps his coat around himself and opens the safe.

"Here I go," he says, crawling inside, and bending himself double to squeeze in. "Lock the door, darling. I'll be out in no time."

I stoop down and notice, when he pulls his feet in, that there is a little steel pick attached to the sole of one shoe. But Mrs. Gorgonzola does not see this. She closes the door and blows him a kiss and then steps back to wait.

In about a minute I can hear this Gallstone fumbling around inside with his pick, working on the combination. I just wait. The tumblers start to click.

ANOTHER minute goes by and another. Still no Gallstone. Mrs. Gorgonzola stoops down.

"Are you all right, Oscar?" she calls.

"Sure—be with you in a jiffy," he gasps.

But a jiffy passes and so does five minutes. And no Gallstone.

Mrs. Gorgonzola is getting impatient.

"Can I help you?" she asks.

"No—I'm—getting on fine—just a second," he groans.

Fifteen more minutes go by. Gallstone is thumping around and rattling the combination and panting for breath.

Mrs. Gorgonzola is getting redder and redder. All at once she looks at her wristwatch.

"You've been in there twenty-five minutes," she calls. "I'll give you five minutes more."

There is a grunt from inside and a lot of rattling. But five minutes pass, and Gallstone is still locked in the safe. The noise stops. Gallstone gives up trying to get out. Mrs. Gorgonzola gives a sigh and looks stern.

"Very well, Oscar, you have shown me your true colors. You are nothing but an imposter. You are not a good magician. You cannot find your way out of a telephone booth, let alone a safe. I will never run off with you. Good night!"

She turns around and marches upstairs. I followed her, because there is nothing more I have to do. I do my job when I keep turning the dial of the safe after Gallstone lines up the tumblers.

SO I go to bed very happy. Gallstone will sneak away like the beaten pup he is. Now I know Mrs. Gorgonzola is all through with him, and there is nothing to worry about. Gorgonzola will be back in a day or so and his tricks are safe after all.

I take off my coat and hat and am just going to remove the tuxedo trousers, when the door opens. Futzi walks in.

"Honorable Feep, I expect you are—oh mercy what in name is honorable

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that?" he yells.

He is staring at my trousers, or rather at the place where my trousers should be. But because of the pants I wear, he does not see anything below my waist at all.

"Oh what unhappy accident!" he wails. "You get cut in twice by auto car?"

"No, of course not," I say.

"Then perhaps you lose on races?"

"There are some things," I answer with dignity, "which I will never bet. No, I do not lose anything."

"But you have no limbs downstairs," Futzi wails. "Just head and torso."

"I have more so than torso," I assure him, stepping out of the trousers. "There, you see? All that happens, Futzi, is I wear this suit of Gorgonzola's. It is some kind of trick suit, because when I wear it I am invisible."

"So?" whispers Futzi. "That is remarkable, also strange."

"Sure," I say. "This must be one of the new tricks that Gorgonzola wishes me to protect. I prefer you do not mention this around. Now I lock the suit up again and that is that."

So I haul out the trunk and lock up the tuxedo and hat. Futzi hangs around staring at me.

"Where is honorable Gallstone?" he asks.

"Downstairs on ice," I tell him. "He locks himself up in a safe like a defense bond."

"Then he does not rush away with Mrs. Gorgonzola?" Futzi says. "I expect they lope off together." His face falls.

"No elopement," I tell him. "You better go down and unlock the safe now and let Gallstone go home."

FUTZI still hangs around.

"Maybe you like me to press honorable suit?" he asks. "Make it nice and fresh for Mr. Gorgonzola to be invisible in? Gorgonzola always proud to look his best even if invisible, I gamble you."

"No, get out of here," I snap.

"I press and iron plenty fast," he begs. "Please, let me press nice invisible coat and trousers."

"I'll press your trousers for you with my foot if you don't scram," I suggest.

So Futzi scrams.

I go to bed. I tuck the keys right under my pillow, too, because I do not wish to lose them. An invisible suit is plenty valuable and I am taking no chances. I figure on keeping awake.

But I am not awake a couple of hours later. In fact I am very much asleep, and dreaming about rabbits with big teeth and bushy hair that are locking me into a safe. The dream is so real I can even hear the tumblers clicking.

The clicking gets louder and I wake up. Then I know what is making the sound. The keys under my pillow.

They are sliding out, in a hand.

It is a yellow hand. Futzi's hand.

He is standing over my bed in the dark, grabbing for those keys.

"Hey!" I yell, jumping up.

"Hey!" I yell, going down again.

Because Futzi's hand drops the keys and grabs my wrist. He jerks it and I go back on my head. Then his other hand gets hold of my waist. I turn over on my stomach. Then he uses both hands in a very busy fashion and we have quite a scramble.

In a minute I am sitting on the bed looking straight into a pair of legs wrapped around my neck.

Something about them looks quite familiar to me. And I suddenly realize that these are my legs. Around my neck. I am tied up like a Christmas package.

Futzi stands in front of me, grinning.

"Very sorry to disturb," he says.

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"What is this?" I gasp, trying to get loose.

"Jiu-jitsu," he tells me.

"Jiu-jitsu? But that's a Japanese trick, isn't it? Then you're not a Filipino, you're a—"

Futzi bows.

"That is most correct," he tells me. "I am not a Filipino, Mr. Feep. Nor do I need to continue the disguise with that ridiculous accent, either. All I require now are those keys of yours. I shall take the suit and leave."

"But I don't understand —" I say.

"Of course not." Futzi laughs, very low. "Why should I disguise myself as a Filipino house boy, get a job in a magician's house, and act as a servant?

"The answer is obvious. Gorgonzola is a clever man, but I know his secret. He has not left town—he's here now, down at local headquarters of army ordnance. He's telling them that he has discovered a new chemical treatment which renders clothing invisible and offering it to the army as a military weapon. Like Dunninger's work in camouflage that makes battleships invisible. The invisible suit is just a sample of the material. Quite a valuable secret.

"Now I have that suit. I shall wear it, slip downtown and put Gorgonzola out of the way once and for all. Information comes to me that his conference with ordnance officials is scheduled for late tonight.

"Naturally I would not be admitted to such a gathering under normal circumstances." Here Futzi gives a little smirk and bow. "But with this suit on as a passport I think I can slip in quite freely. With your curiosity thus satisfied, I leave you."

I still sit there with my legs tied into Boy Scout knots while Futzi goes over to the closet, hauls out the trunk, and opens it. He gets the dress suit and hat and slips them on very fast. He is so small the clothes hang all over him and in a few seconds he is gone. Disappears into thin air. I see the door open. His voice chuckles.

"Goodnight, honorable Feep," he says, sarcastic. "We must discuss hari-kari again some time. Perhaps you will prefer committing it yourself when you think of what's going to happen to your friend Gorgonzola."

THEN the door closes and I am left tied to be fit. I grunt and groan and wrestle with myself, but I can not get my legs loose. Finally I roll off the bed onto the floor. That does it. It cracks my skull, but it loosens my legs.

I stagger downstairs to the phone and look up the ordnance headquarters number. I ring and there is no answer. Then I decide to call the cops—until I remember this invisible suit stuff is a military secret. Also, it will not sound so good to ask the cops to chase an invisible man at midnight.

So there is only one thing to do. I spot Gallstone's Packard still standing outside. Futzi has the other car, of course.

I have some trouble sitting down inside, with my sore legs, but no trouble at all in getting that car up to ninety. When I think of that invisible little Jap sneaking around and trying to knock off Gorgonzola and steal his plans, I know there is no time to lose.

In exactly seven minutes I pull up in front of the old destination. The joint is dark, but open, and I make the stairs very fast to the second floor. There is a light burning in an office room and the door is open. They are inside—and I am sure from the open door that Futzi is with them. Invisible.

I tiptoe in and look through the inside door. There are four characters sitting around a desk, and sure enough,

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Gorgonzola is with them. He has a briefcase open in front of him and he is talking very fast.

I am the only one who sees what is behind him, though. It hangs in the air very still, but it is ready for action. A big black revolver, in the hands of that invisible Jap.

I throw myself through the doorway and grab the revolver. There is a lot of yelling, but I get it in my hands. Then there is a real yell.

Naturally, all these birds can see is me, waving a gun. They do not see any invisible Futzi, and I can not yell out to them to look for him, either. He can be hiding anywhere in the room and nobody can spot him.

So I just turn my gun around, point it at a perfect bullseye, and shoot Futzi.

And that is how I save a military secret.

LEFTY FEEP stopped waving the celery and put it in his mouth.

"I can understand now why it upset you when I spoke of not seeing you," I said. "You must have had quite an experience."

"Sure. But it is O.K. now. Gorgonzola gives the ordnance department his new chemical invisibility formula, his wife gives Gallstone the air, and I give that little Jap spy some lead poisoning where it does him the least good."

I coughed.

"About that business of shooting the Jap," I said. "There's just one question that bothers me."

"Yes?"

"Well, you say he was wearing this invisible suit and nobody could see him. Yet you managed to shoot him at once. Just what were you aiming at?"

Feep blushed.

"I do not like to say exactly," he confessed. "But I will mention that I get suspicious that night when Futzi hangs around wanting to get his hands on the suit. I decide to figure out a way to make the suit a little less invisible, in case it is worn by anybody else. So I do, and as a result when Futzi wears it he gives me a target he does not notice himself in his hurry putting it on."

"What target?" I persisted.

"I refuse to say," Feep grinned. "All I can tell you is that before I lock honorable suit up for the night, I take a scissors and cut a big hole in the seat of honorable pants."

« NEWS ITEM: FLY EATS SPIDER! »

WON'T you step into my parlor said the spider to the fly."

This popular ditty has been reversed in one instance however. And to make the reversal even more strange, the fly does its eating from the inside and takes his time about it, leisurely allowing a year to turn its eight-legged victim into an empty shell.

This brilliantly black-and-yellow fly is known to scientists as Ocnaea smithi. His unfortunate victim is the trapdoor spider, which lives in a silk-lined tunnel with a lid so tight that it is almost impossible to open it even by force when the spider is at home.

The female fly lays her eggs on the wings of the spider, dropping them like tiny bombs over a marked city. Most of the larvae are destroyed, but one or two of these tiny grubs may find a spider burrow and literally worm their way in. The larva then gnaws its way through the spider's skin and for a year feeds within its victim's body, slowly hollowing it out while gradually expanding itself, growing fatter all along.

Finally, the overgrown grub emerges, attaches itself to the silken lining of the burrow, and goes through the transformations that terminate in the adult, winged fly. After a year of underground, boring-from-within existence, the fly emerges into upper air and sunlight, to mate and breed and repeat the cycle.

Adult life of the insect is short as it has no feeding mouthparts. Their life span is a year in the dark and a week in the world of sunlight.

—*Carter C. Wainwright.*

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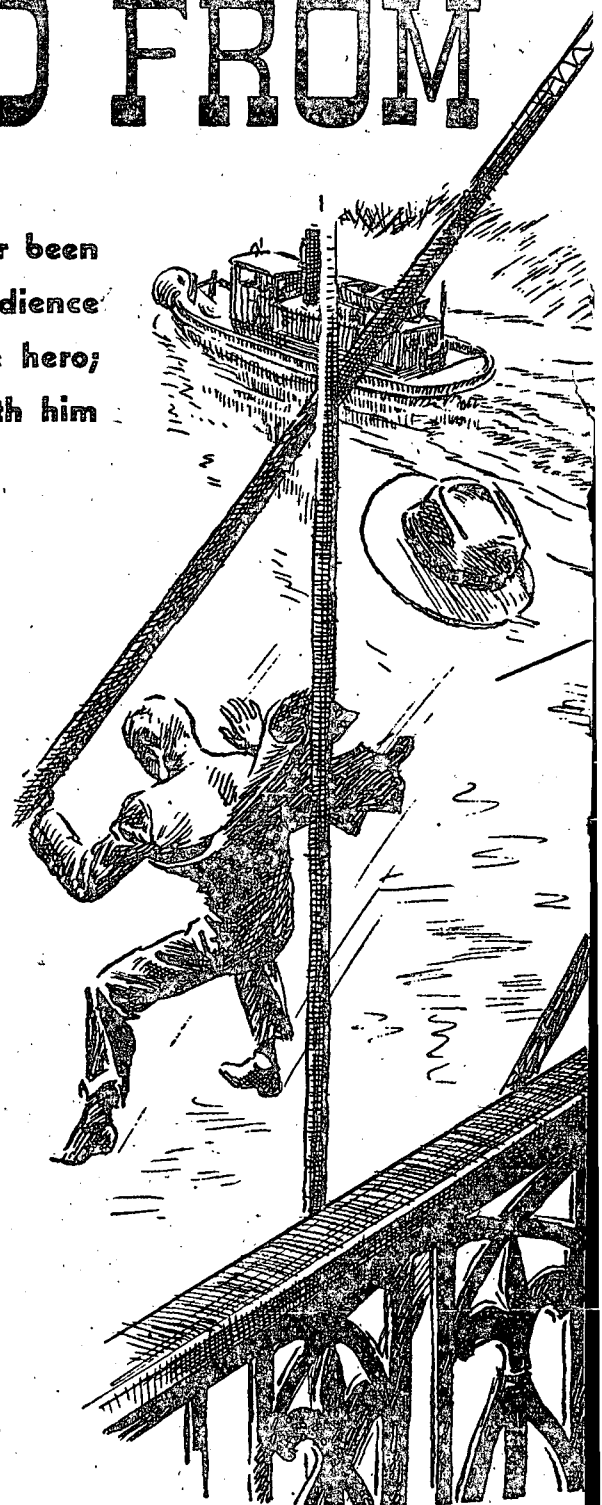
THE KID FROM

No movie like this had ever been seen before! Because the audience actually lived the role of the hero; fighting, loving, suffering with him

by
ERIC
FRANK
RUSSELL



EMORY MORGAN felt like Napoleon and suspected that he didn't look unlike him either. He sat regally in the depths of the throne-like chair behind his half-acre desk, put a very expensive cigar into his very fat face, let his supremely satisfied eyes gloat over the great length of carpet stretching from the desk to the distant door. This was the life.

It had been a tough fight to get from wholesale junk jewels to effective control of Motion Picture Superproductions, still tougher to establish the complete monopoly on which he'd set whatever he'd got for a heart. But he'd done it. Some had jumped off the bridge, some had fallen by the wayside, and a few had raked up the sense to climb aboard the bandwagon. Yesterday's final merger had put him in actual, if not nominal, control of the whole of the nation's film industry. Now he could give orders, and what he said,

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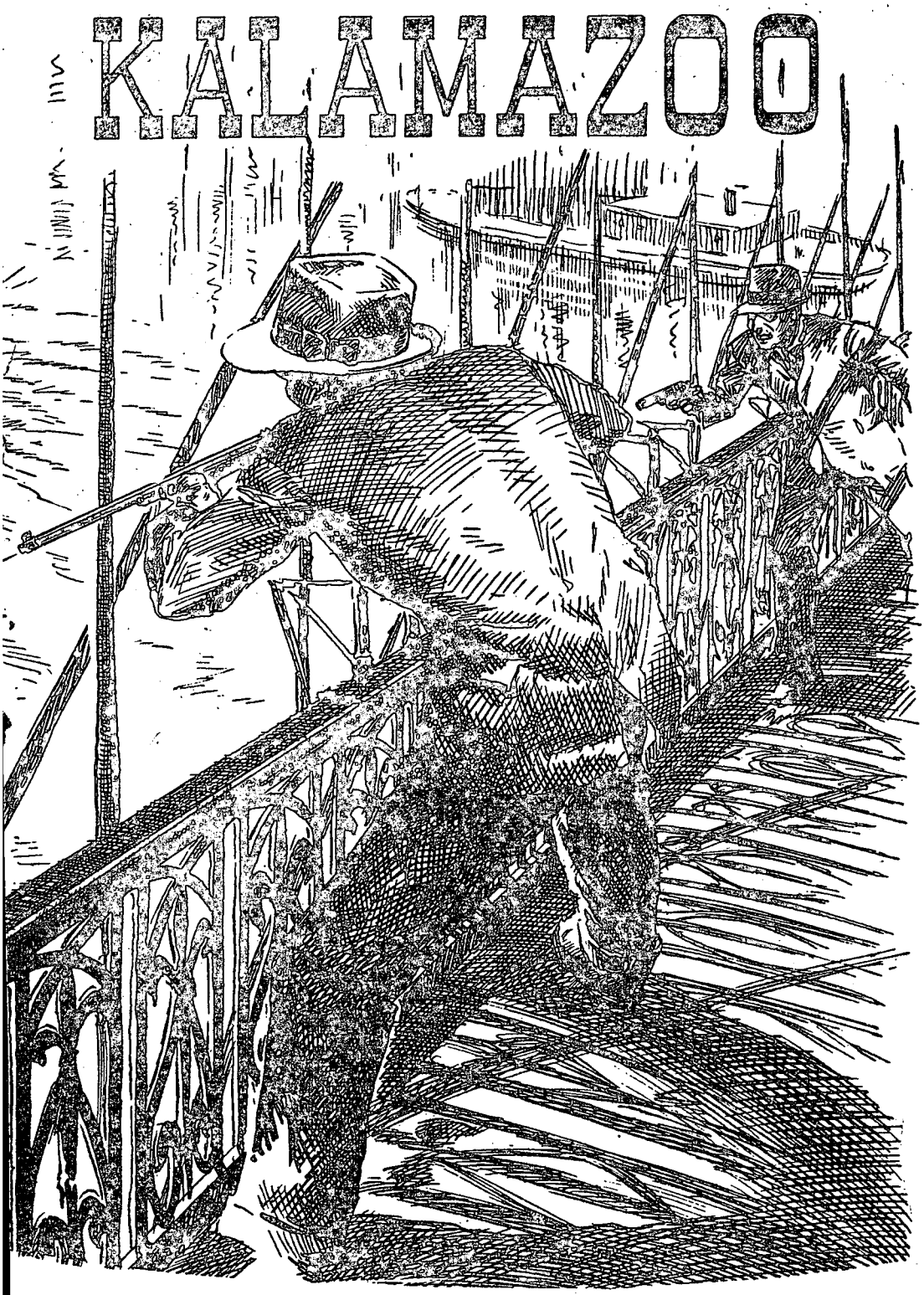

This was no movie; it was the real thing to the audience!

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went. He could hire 'em and fire 'em; make 'em and break 'em. He was the master of all he surveyed.

Jabbing one of the many buttons on his desk, he puffed his cigar with an air of well-deserved opulence, watched the door. Presently, Miss Dreener gave a discreet knock, opened, came toward him with lithe hip movements. She was a cute piece of work, very trim, beautifully groomed, most efficient, her manner always pleasingly respectful. Morgan liked them slick and respectful, especially the latter. A man deserved respect when he had your bread in his right hand, your butter in his left.

Contemptuously flicking a couple of papers across the mirror sheen of his desk, he said in a loud voice, "What in hell're these?"

She picked them up in long, delicate fingers with blood-red nails. Her manner was that of a woman reporter reluctantly compelled to obtain an archbishop's views about sex.

"The midwest circuit of independent exhibitors object to the film rota system," she replied. Switching letters, she looked at the second one. "This man Dore, a Kalamazoo exhibitor, has written us repeatedly. He protests against the rota system. He says he'll organize his local circuit for militant action."

"Well," growled Morgan, "can't Crait attend to them? What am I paying him for? Ain't he here to bounce all the bellyachers, and ain't I plastering him with my money for doing it?"

"Mr. Crait has been dealing with the matter," explained Miss Dreener, evenly. "He has told them that Motion Picture Superproductions is quite unable to permit free selection from its output and that exhibitors are requested to accept the weekly series circulated in the rota."

"Requested!" pshawed Morgan. "He requests them! The hell with that guff!" He glared at her. "What's the matter with Crait? He still spending my time mauling the office blondes? Don't he know we got the shebang in our pocket?"

"Yes, Mr. Morgan, but—"

"Why don't Crait tell 'em to go bake their brains, if they got any? Why don't he tell 'em to take what we give or do without?" His features began to heighten in color. He gnawed the cigar savagely. "Seems Mark Crait's too small to know when he's big. Send him in to me. I'll ask him if he's working for us or who."

"Mr. Crait has already informed the complainants that they are in no position to criticize," soothed Miss Dreener. "He has told them they'll have to take what they get." She looked at him carefully, added, "As a matter of fact, he told them to like it or lump it. He thought you would approve."

"I okay that." Emory Morgan leaned back, examined the ceiling with the air of Mohammed looking for Paradise. "All right. Why worry me? Ain't I got worries enough? Ain't my time worth ten berries a tick no more? Does Mark want me to put love and kisses on his letters?"

"THE matter had gone further," she said. "Mr. Crait thought it time you were informed." She flourished the second letter. "This man Dore, in Kalamazoo, is now threatening that his proposed organization will appeal to the Federal Government that action be taken under anti-trust laws and that free selection of film productions be restored in the interest of public policy."

"Hah!" Morgan enjoyed an expansive smirk. "A tough guy! Well, we ain't a trust. We're a national industry. What's more, we've got a few senatorial shareholders who ain't go-

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ing to slaughter their favorite hogs to please some punk in Kalamazoo. That guy can go suck his lollipop. Tell Crait to ignore him. Let him petition, let him sue, let him go nuts of he ain't nuts already."

"Yes, Mr. Morgan."

"And tell Gloria Sweeting she's through."

"Oh, Mr. Morgan!" For once she lost her poise, went wide-eyed.

His color went up again, he roared at her, "What the devil's the matter with you? You going deaf, or something? Tell that blonde ham she's on the shelf. I'll teach her to argue with me."

"But, Mr. Morgan, her contract—"

He stood up. No he didn't. It was something grander than that, something more in keeping with his power and personal magnetism. He arose majestically.

"Is everyone crazy this morning? Ain't I got nobody who can take orders? Do I have to run Motion Picture Superproductions all my myself?" Resting his belly on the rim of the desk, he stared at her long and hard. She didn't answer, neither did she quail. "I made her contract. I can bust it. Sling her some hash and push her off the lot."

"Very well, Mr. Morgan." She went out. Very shortly, she returned, another paper in her hand. Looking at him, she said, "He's written again."

"Who has?"

"This man Dore."

"Bah!" Morgan sat down, crumpled the remains of his cigar, mashed it in the ash-tray.

"He says he intends to pay you a personal call."

"What for?" He got the rats again as she stood and hesitated. "Well, out with it! You struck dumb?"

Flushing, she said tartly, "He says he wishes to save you from the consequences of your own folly."

Disregarding her presence, Emory Morgan began to swear. He was sulphurating like a volcano as she stole out.

THE kid from Kalamazoo turned up the following Thursday. He was quite a nice kid, clean-cut, burly, but somewhat indifferent about his unruly hair. His eyes were as blue as a baby's and fully as innocent, he had a very large assortment of freckles, and his pants looked as if they had been slept in a few dozens of times. In general, he seemed a healthy, clean, but very naïve specimen who hadn't yet discerned the truth concerning Santa Claus and still believed that story about the stork.

Presenting himself at the main gate, he stared like a yokel at the big neon which said in twelve-foot letters of fire: *Motion Picture Superproductions*. Fidgeting around, he failed to find the bell, so rattled the gate.

To the uniformed guard who answered, he said, "My name is Daniel P. Dore. The P stands for Praise-the-Lord, but you may call me Dan." He smiled ingratiatingly. "I wish to see Mr. Emory Morgan."

"Do you now?" said the Mick at the gate. "Guess I'd better tell him to come along pronto." Then he narrowed his eyes, pushed out his jaw, and rasped, "Skeram!"

"What," protested Mr. Dore, his blue eyes faintly shocked, "after coming all this way? Not likely! Please be good enough to inform Mr. Morgan that I wish to see him at once. Tell him that my time is valuable and I would appreciate a modicum of swiftness on his part."

"Eh?" The Mick looked a little dazed.

Mr. Dore obligingly put it in sim-

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pler language. "Tell Mr. Morgan that I am a very busy man with no time to waste on frivolities, and that I'd be glad if he'd see me without delay."

The guardian of the gate put a hairy hand on a side-post. He seemed in need of temporary support. He stared unbelievingly at Dan Dore who reciprocated by regarding him with blue eyes of incredible blandness. That and the freckles and the cherubic countenance made a combination that fascinated the Mick. After a while, the Mick shouted into an adjoining hut, brought out a second guard.

Pointing at Dan, he mouthed, "Just listen to this guy." Then to Dan, "Go on, tell Joe what you just told me."

"What's the matter," inquired Dan, mildly. "Are you a Bulgarian by any chance? Can't you understand plain English?"

The Mick scowled. Joe made a supporting grimace.

"I want to see Mr. Emory Morgan," repeated Dan. "What's stupefying about that?"

"You don't know Morgan," growled the Mick.

"I'll say he doesn't," agreed Joe.

"Neither does he know me," Dan pointed out. "Is he such a stickler for the niceties of etiquette that he cannot converse without the formality of an introduction?"

"Motheruvmike!" exclaimed the Mick.

"Imagine Old Jelliguts knowing anything about ettikay," said Joe.

"Old Jelliguts," echoed Dan. "Dear me! An amusing pseudonym. He is a paunchy man, I presume?"

THE first guard fervently repeated his appeal to the maternal parent of the invisible Mike. The one named Joe elbowed him aside, bent his beetle brows, bugged his eyes at Dan.

"You got a line of talk. What're you selling?"

"In a way," Dan explained, "I wish to sell Mr. Morgan an idea."

"Oh, an inventor," said Joe. He turned to the Mick. "Another nut inventor." He turned back to Dan. "Morgan ain't interested."

"Good heavens!" Downright astonishment filled the innocent eyes. "A clairvoyant!"

"Don't you start calling me names," warned Joe. He showed his teeth. "I've told you Morgan ain't interested."

"I suppose he informed you of this fact after receiving my missive. Dear me, the man is most precipitate. I would not have credited that anyone could be so indifferent about his own career."

The Mick swallowed hard, said to his partner, "Let's give this kid a break, Joe. You go phone the office before he uses up his tongue and puts the whammy on us. Gwan, give him a break—maybe somebody'll take him offen our hands."

Joe oscillated his brows, disappeared into the hut. He was a long time on the phone, came out somewhat surly.

"Percival will see you."

"Who's Percival," demanded the persistent Mr. Dore.

"He's just the sweetest thing," assured Joe. "He's the forty-fourth deputy-assistant-under-secretary or sumpin." He lugged open the gate. "Come on, get in before someone changes his mind."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," beamed Dan. He wandered through. Joe conducted him along the broadwalk to Percival's office, dropped him thankfully.

PERCIVAL proved to be a delicious person attired in a shapely, deep-waisted jacket, perfectly pressed pants

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and very glossy shoes. He also had on a mauve silk shirt. His hands were nicely manicured, his eyelashes unusually long and sweeping.

"Mr. Dore, I understand?" he chirruped. He looked Dan over, smoothed his hair, patted his undisturbed tie. "And what," he asked, roguishly, "can I do for you?"

"Good gracious!" said Dan. His blue eyes blinked. "I wish to see Mr. Morgan."

"Oh, quite, quite." A subtle perfume stole from Percival's hair. "But Mr. Morgan is a busy man, an exceedingly busy man. If disturbed unnecessarily, he tends to be harsh, somewhat unreasonable." The eyelashes operated effectively. "Surely I can serve you in some way?"

"Indeed you can." Dan sniffed loudly. His eyes held pained surprise. "You can fetch Mr. Morgan and let me save him from financial ruin."

"Yes, yes," said Percival, fluttering his eyelids, "but as I have told you, Mr. Morgan is—" His high voice tailed off, his face swapped expressions, his mouth hung open. "Eh? What was that you just said?"

"Dear me," sighed Dan. "What can be wrong with everyone's hearing?" His blue eyes looked mildly through the window, observed the near-city that was Motion Picture Superproduction's lot. "Nobody hears, nobody listens. I can't see how you manage to do business. Think, this might have been quite a big place by now had your affairs been conducted with some semblance of efficiency."

"Eh?" said Percival again.

His mouth was still out of control. He walked gracefully toward the window, gaped through it as if seeking something that wasn't there.

"Now back in Kalamazoo," declaimed Dan, "we make locomotives and all sorts of really useful things. We are so far advanced that we can understand speech. We didn't have to wait for someone to invent the wheelbarrow before we learned to walk on our hind legs. We are, as you will have gathered, rather civilized." He nudged Percival. "Can you comprehend my words?"

Percival started violently. The hand he put to his hair was uncertain. "Yes, yes, to be sure."

"And," continued Dan, "we do business as man to man with none of the silly procrastination such as I have experienced here. Out in Kalamazoo, if I wanted Mr. Morgan I'd get Mr. Morgan and we'd complete our business in the minimum of time."

"Yes," said Percival, faintly.

"Trouble is you're not slick enough." The baby blue eyes looked severe. "You appear to be in a sort of industrial backwater this side of the continent."

"True," gabbled Percival. He moved away from the window. Keeping his eyes on Dan, he picked up a phone, called an extension. "Mr. Schultze? Is that Mr. Schultze? Can you see Mr. Dore?" His pleading voice became hurried. "No, no, I can't say. It would be best if you dealt with him. Yes, it may be important, it seems to be of some importance. Oh, quite, Mr. Schultze. Yes, right away." He pronged the phone. "Mr. Schultze will see you."

"Tut-tut," said Dan. "I asked for Mr. Morgan."

"I know." Percival sat down, smoothed his hair, fanned himself with a silk handkerchief. "Mr. Schultze will see to it." He was still fanning himself dazedly when Joe turned up to take Dan away.

SCHULTZE was the direct opposite of Percival, a massive man with a

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bull neck and blue jowls. His closely cropped gray hair stuck up in an aggressive bristle and his nose was more for snorting than breathing.

Dan said, "Ah, Mr. Schultze! Delighted to meet you!" He didn't offer his hand.

Distorting his beefy features into what he considered irresistible joviality, Schultze rumbled, "Now, Mr. Dore, kindly state your business as speedily as possible and I'll see what can be done for you."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Dan, fervently. "Action at last!" A pious expression drifted across his cherubic countenance. "I wish to have a personal interview with Mr. Emory Morgan."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of the financial future of this business and, of course, the prospects of Mr. Morgan's own career."

"What paper do you represent?"

"Paper? I have nothing to do with papers. I am an independent exhibitor—from Kalamazoo."

"Really!" The joviality fled from Schultze's face, was replaced by a strained look. "It doesn't happen by any chance that you're that crank who's been writing in promising to take this outfit for a ride?"

"Dear me." Dan scratched his head. "My missives made no such threat. They merely appealed for the reestablishment of the right of exhibitors to make free selections. I did remark that otherwise the said exhibitors would be compelled to take whatever steps they considered necessary to preserve their livelihood." The blue eyes became childishly frank. "And it is true that such steps might bring about the complete dissolution of Motion Picture Superproductions."

"Might they?" inquired Schultze, with heavy sarcasm. He snorted like a rising hippopotamus. "We're a five hundred million dollar conglomeration of movie producers. We're in control of the whole of this country's film output. And you, a two-bit squirt from Kalamazoo, think you can buck us. Pah!" Another snort. "Old Jelliguts'd have my pelt if I let a punk like you waste his valuable time."

"Calm yourself," advised Dan. "Don't permit your somewhat precipitate emotions to mislead you." The blue eyes were now paternal. "Way out in Kalamazoo we comport ourselves with equanimity. That is why we are efficient."

"Are you insinuating that we aren't efficient?" Schultze stood up behind his desk. "You'd better go home. You're too young to roam loose around these parts. Somebody's liable to smack your bottom."

"A most improper remark," reproved Dan. "I doubt whether Mr. Morgan would sanction such a comment."

"How the hell do you know what Morgan would or would not sanction?" roared Schultze. His neck hairs quivered. "We've had more than enough of smarties like you. Now get out!"

DAN sat down, crossed his legs, looked imperturbably into the other's furious face. "Don't be so uncouth. It would pay you very well to be civil—you may be in need of a job someday."

"Me?" Schultze yelled.

"You," confirmed Dan. He waved a vague hand. "And most everyone else, for that matter—unless Morgan is willing to listen to reason." His bland eyes became faintly ruminative. "I am most loath to be drastic, but at least my conscience will be clear. I guess you'll have to be satisfied with a

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hot-dog concession some place."

"A hot-dog concession," yammered Schultze, his features waxing livid.

"Don't parrot me," said Dan, evenly. "You don't appear to appreciate the fact, but you are now at the crossroads of your career. It is up to you to protect your own interests by letting me see Mr. Morgan forthwith. I am most anxious to save him from the consequences of his own stubborn attitude."

With surprising suddenness, Schultze cooled down. Regaining his seat, he gave Dan his full attention, staring at him in silence broken only by his own heavy breathing.

After a while, he said, "You ever done any acting?"

"Bless my soul, certainly not!"

"Well, maybe you will do some soon." He got up, went to the door. "Just you wait here a minute. Just you sit and wait. I'll see what Old Jelliguts has to say about you."

"No more passing me along," warned Dan. "I've neither the time nor inclination to hold ineffectual conversations with three-quarters of the staff before reaching Mr. Morgan."

"All right," agreed Schultze. "You just sit and wait like I told you." He stared hard at Dan, then went out, breathing asthmatically. Before long he returned with Joe. "Morgan'll see you." Another long stare, then, "Take my tip, mister, make it good."

"Make what good?"

"Never mind." Schultze seated himself heavily, blew his nose, frowned at the papers on his desk. "Just you talk at him. You hand him that line of yours—that's all I ask."

JOE shoved it open, gaped toward the desk in the dim distance and said in a hoarse voice, "Mr. Daniel P. Dore." Rapidly, he beat it.

A girl left the desk, came quickly down the room, a notebook in one hand, a pencil in the other. Politely, Dan stood and held the door open for her. It took her a long time to cover that stretch, but he stood there patiently, his mild eyes covering her approach. The solitary figure at the huge desk also watched. She kept her sangfroid despite this fore-and-aft surveillance, but her poise was shaken as she exited.

Dan said, gravely, "He ought to give you a bicycle, Luscious."

Her mouth quirked as her eyes looked into his blue ones. He stood in the doorway, admiringly watched her retreat along the outer corridor. Several times the figure at the desk harumphed without avail. It was not until the girl rounded the corner that Dan turned and waded through the carpet toward the desk.

He paused halfway, sighed, said to the silent observer, "This is Dore, on safari."

Reaching the desk, he hitched one leg across its shining corner, made himself comfortable, and inquired, "If you don't mind me asking, who was the fair lady?"

"Miss Dreener, my secretary," grunted Morgan. He squatted low in his seat, his hard optics fixed unswervingly on the other. His face was totally devoid of expression.

"H'm!" mused Dan. He gestured to the space between desk and door. "That isn't bad psychology. The humble petitioner is forced to make a journey of his approach." The blue eyes turned to the impassive Morgan. "But it is only an imperfect job. It could have been bettered."

"How?"

"For example, it would have been a great improvement to have stepped this end of the room a couple of feet higher than the rest, and to have moved that hanging lamp three yards farther for-

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ward." Leaning over, he propped an elbow on the desk, used the elbow to prop his head. "Then any expedition that succeeded in getting this far would find itself parading on the lower level and in the full glare of the light. You would be higher and half-concealed. You'd have the tactical advantage. The effect on respective egos would be most satisfactory from your point of view."

Morgan came a little more erect in his seat. "I reckon there's something in that."

"Of course there is! It should have been done in the first place." Dan casually studied his nails. "But I've become accustomed to inefficiency around this dump."

"Inefficiency," growled Morgan. He leaned forward, his eyes glowing. Then he changed his mind, relaxed again. "Go on," he urged, "say your piece."

"THE position is so simple that you should find little difficulty in comprehending it," explained Dan. He toyed with an inkpot, favored Morgan with a look of bland friendliness. "I am deputed by a small circuit of independent exhibitors to demand that you restore the old practice of free choice of film products. We have written to you on this subject a number of times, and we feel that we can no longer let it remain in abeyance. So we're giving you a last chance."

"You're giving me what?"

"A last chance," repeated Dan. "Good gracious, I cannot remember a day when I encountered so many people who were hard of hearing."

"That'll do me!" said Morgan. "You go along to Arty Lipoli and tell him I said you was to get a test."

"A test?" Dan looked surprised. "I have not the slightest intention of subjecting myself to any test of any description. Neither am I interested in this Mr. Lipoli."

Leaning forward, Morgan grinned beefily. "D'you know why I consented to see you?"

"I could hazard a guess or two. Possibly your conscience has smitten you."

"Conscience be damned!" rapped Morgan, still grinning. "Schultze phoned through to say he'd got for me a good type. He said he'd picked up a talking clown. We can use you providing you'll take okay. Yeah, we ain't got one quite like you."

"You want to feature me in your productions?" inquired Dan. His eyes opened wide. "Bless my soul!"

"You're a lucky guy, mister," patronized Morgan. He let his proud, satisfied eyes take in the huge room. "You're on the rainbow trail with the biggest outfit that ever was. You've got Emory Morgan right behind you, and that means you can't go wrong."

"Bless my soul!" repeated Dan.

"You'll be in the money if you're as good as you ought to be when I've finished with you. It'll take time, of course—but I'm the man to bring out the best that's in you. Now you run along and take that test. If Lipoli says you're photogenic, you can come and see me about that contract."

"A movie actor; fancy me a movie actor!" said Dan. "How disgusting!"

"Eh?"

"Now to return to the subject of whether or not the independent exhibitors are to get a square deal," Dan went on. "Do you or do you not intend to restore the policy of free selection?"

"Independent exhibitors . . . free selection." Morgan mouthed the words as though he'd never heard them before. Abruptly, his face reddened. He roared, "To hell with them whining pikers!"

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"So you defy me?"

"Huhn?" Morgan gulped, stood up, stared at the other.

Unpropping his head, Dan sat upright on the corner of the desk, favored his opponent with a look of mild reproof.

"You do not appear to realize it, but I have you across the barrel with your southern aspect prominently exposed." He watched interestedly as Morgan's mouth dropped open, then shut. He continued, "This is definitely your last chance. Do I have to paddle you or not?"

Morgan's face went from red to purple, he found his voice, bellowed, "You impudent pup!" and savagely jabbed every button on the desk. He was still both colorful and vocal when the dozen who responded solemnly paraded Dan along the room and out of his sight.

MARK CRAIT was the first to smell a rat. He barged into Morgan's room, did the length of the carpet in record time, grabbed a chair and one of Morgan's cigars. The latter act was one he'd cultivated to remind his chief that he, Crait, was a privileged person in this neck of the woods.

"Boss, there's something fishy afoot."

"So what?" growled Morgan, disinterestedly. "Ain't you paid to keep them stinks to yourself?"

"Yup, but this is outside. It ain't on the lot. It's way over there in Kalamazoo."

"It would be." Morgan scowled at Crait's face mirrored in the surface of the desk. He flicked some ash over the face. "That young squirt Dore, eh?"

"He's behind it, boss. Seems that last Thursday he held a meeting of Southern Michigan exhibitors in his cinema. The date coincided with the expiration of their current rota contract." He paused there, lit the cigar with a dramatic flourish.

"Go on," urged Morgan. "You ain't projecting a cowboy serial."

"After this gabfest, they notified our local agency that the contract would not be renewed."

"Hah!" Morgan's clipped laugh was almost a bark. How many halls they got?"

"One hundred and fourteen."

"That all?" He ashed the face again. "Maybe they're aiming to import foreign productions, but they can't drag in a half quota of bum stuff at double price and still compete. It ain't economical. Let 'em try it. In a few months they'll be as sorry as hell. They'll come crawling back to us."

Crait blinked. "I thought that, boss. But it ain't so. That's what's fishy—they've closed down their halls until further notice."

"You mean they ain't exhibiting at all?"

"Yup."

"Well, what the devil are they doing?"

"I don't know, boss. I sent Harkshaw out there last Saturday, to smell around. He phoned through this morning. He says that all the halls are shut and that the entertainment columns of the local sheets are carrying notices saying that the halls are temporarily closed pending completion of alterations."

"Alterations!" Morgan's natural suspicon woke up in a hurry. "Look, Mark, what does that suggest to you?"

"Something new."

"Yeah, something new. But there ain't anything new. There can't be anything new, at least, not in movies." Sliding open a drawer, he dragged out a printed sheet, held it up. "See?" he said. The words on the sheet were known all over the world:

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Every M. P. S. Epic Is
In glorious color!
Completely scented!
With full-range sound!
And three-dimensional!

GLANCING at it, Crait said, "They can't beat that. It ain't humanly possible. There ain't any more improvements to be made. Smells and stereoscopy brought our flickies as near to reality as they'll be in another thousand years, and our hold on patent rights is good and tight. I've looked into that! I thought there might be a loophole somewhere, and that some smarties had thought up a sneaker, but we've got the master patents as sure as you've got the movie trade in your mitts."

"Don't tell me." Morgan was half surly, half gratified. "I bought 'em. I know what I bought."

"Only thing I can think of," pursued Crait, brightly, "is that they're going to clean out of the show business and into something else. Maybe they're calculating on starting another craze like miniature golf or roller skating."

"That'll suit me." Morgan's grin came back. "Them crazes bust quicker'n they inflate. Let them hicks burn their fingers—in a few months they'll be outside the gates praying for pics." The grin widened. "By which time our rates will have upped ten percent."

"Sure," said Crait. "Sure." He got up, looked doubtfully at the other, went slowly out.

IT WAS a month before Crait was back with the same bee in occupation of his bonnet. His entrance was as hasty as before, he sat himself even more hurriedly, but he forgot the cigar. He was considerably out of breath.

"Kalamazoo," he wheezed. "Dore."

"That guy again?" Morgan looked pained.

"The close-down's spread. The only halls still open in Detroit are ours. All the independents have shut up shop. What's more, they're selling their projectors." He panted a bit, went on. "Remember them five redundant jobs on our Chicago-South Bend circuit which we threw on the market? Well, this punk Dore bidded in and got them."

"He did?"

"And that ain't all. I came across Gloria Sweeting this morning. She acted hoity-toity. You'd've thought I was dirt. She said she was leaving this putrid burg forthwith, and them was her exact words. She's leaving for Kalamazoo tonight. Dore's given her a job as a professional emotionalist."

"As a what?" Morgan had found the inevitable cigar and was just about to stick it in his mouth. He almost swallowed it.

"She didn't know any more than that, or if she did she wasn't telling. She said she was going to emote for Dore." He waited, but Morgan stared and said nothing, so he carried on. "Harkshaw brought this back." He tossed a newspaper clipping on the desk.

Morgan leaned forward, gaped at it, a small, boxed advertisement in heavy print. It said:

Wanted: Fluent, sensitive, imaginative, well-educated people for training as professional emotionalists. This is a highly remunerative opportunity for the right persons. Box W. 1887.

"The guy's nuts," opined Morgan, positively.

"That's what I think. But he's managed to convince a considerable number of fellow exhibitors that whatever

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he's got on his mind makes sense, and not all them boys are dopes. I don't like it, boss, I don't like it."

"Quite right," approved Morgan. "I don't want you to like it. I ain't worrying, but I expect you to worry. You go on worrying, Mark, and you won't be chiseling me outa your pay." He pressed one of the buttons, silently watched the uneasy Crait go out, watched the self-possessed Miss Dreener come in.

SHE got up to his desk, seated herself, opened her book, patted her perfectly arranged hair, made her pencil ready. Then, before he had time to dictate, she spoke to him.

"By the way, Mr. Morgan, I shall be leaving your service Saturday."

"Eh?" He was startled. "You getting married?"

"Oh, no!" She smiled a little, pinked a little. "I'm moving to the mid-West. I have been offered a most attractive post in Kalamazoo."

"H'm, I see," he said, easily. He mused a moment, then his face contorted, and he yelped at her, "Where?"

She dropped her book, picked it up, repeated, "Kalamazoo." He arose from his seat, his eyes bugging at he. She stood up, too. Apologetically, she said, "I'm going to become an emotionalist."

With a mighty effort, Morgan controlled himself, asked very deliberately, "And what in the name of all that's holy is an emotionalist?"

"I don't know—yet. But it's a very interesting and remunerative post. I understand that it offers opportunities equal to anything in the movie business. Mr. Dore gave me my chance. Hs is a very charming man."

Morgan flopped back in his seat, waved his hands feebly. "Beat it and leave me to think. I've forgotten what I wanted you to write down, so beat it."

THE affair continued to spread. One of Motion Picture Superproduction's statisticians made Morgan a day-by-day graph showing the rise in number of non-contracting halls. The graph went up in a steady line, but Morgan stubbornly refused to take notice until the day it reached the six hundred mark. Then he summoned Crait.

"Look, Mark, this squirt Dore ain't getting into my hair, so don't you think that he is."

"No, boss," responded Crait, dutifully. His tongue poked around in his cheek.

"But I'm curious about him. I want some dirt on who he is and what he's doing, see? And I want to know who's digging up the dough for him to play with."

"Might be Krupa or Walmsley or the Aston brothers," hazarded Crait.

"Who knows? They all stepped out with plenty when we absorbed their lots, but any of them'd be glad to take a smack at us. You go get yourself a likely shamus and tell him to find out."

Crait obeyed orders. It took him a fortnight to get hold of the required information, by which time the graph recorded seven hundred and four and Morgan's cigars were being more eaten than smoked. Crait came in with a bunch of papers.

"This guy Dore is twenty-four years old and is said to be a demon in diapers."

"Don't talk melodramatic," reproved Morgan. "I been in the business too long."

"It's the flatfoot's report," Crait explained. "Up to a year ago Dore was a research worker with the North American Electric Corporation. He was a clever guy at his job. In fact, he was a scientist of some merit, despite his age."

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"Go on."

"He chucked this post and became a movie exhibitor when his old man died and left him the *Rotunda* in Kalamazoo. Nobody knows why he threw up a good post, but—" He paused tantalizingly.

"Someday, Mark, I'll break your neck," Morgan promised.

Crait finished it hurriedly. "But the North American Electric Corporation is financing him right now!"

"Hell in a bed!" Morgan scowled ferociously. "That outfit can match bucks with us and hardly call it money. They're colossal, co-lossal!"

"I know it," said Crait, full of sympathetic gloom. "I looked 'em up. All that gold down there in Kentucky is just their petty cash."

"You comfort me," Morgan told him, scowling even more. "You make me feel tranquil. That's what I like about you, Mark."

Looking self-conscious, Crait said, "Aw, boss, you wanted to be told."

"Sure I wanted to be told. But I ain't asked you to rub it in, did I? Never mind, carry on and give me the rest. I can take it. Nobody ever said Emory Morgan couldn't take it—and dish it out." He settled back, eyes gleaming.

"The exhibitors won't say what Dore put across them. They just snigger dirtily and tell us to study the papers. But Jack Embleton did remark that when they were ready they were going to knock the public's ears off with a startling version of *Manhattan Nocturne*."

"He did?" A swift change came over Morgan's face. The gleam in his eyes brightened until his optics flared with a predatory light. "*Manhattan Nocturne*, eh? The year's best seller. Well, that's fine, that's real fine!" He rubbed his hands together. "Let 'em go right ahead, Mark. They're riding the rail, though they don't know it. I'll show them they can't cock a snoot at this outfit!"

"I don't see it, boss," Crait protested.

"Of course you don't, Mark." The magnate was positively amiable. "Now you run along and worry. Leave the next move to Emory Morgan, and you do the worrying in the meantime."

MORGAN studied the papers. It was five weeks before he found anything, and then he failed to grasp its significance until he was passing Jack Embleton's place on his way to the lot. He lounged back in his Cadillac, idly raked through the morning sheet, found right in the middle of it a simple advertisement in huge letters that occupied a full page:

WATCH FOR YOUR
LOCAL
DORMITORIUM

He scanned it without feeling as much as mildly curious, turned over the pages and examined the financial columns. M. P. S. shares were down by twelve cents for the third successive week. Just one of those vagaries. Probably some sizeable holder was unloading. If they got down to within reasonable reach of par he'd step in and buy, thus strengthening his personal holding.

Then he glanced through the side window at Embleton's *Plaza* which was one of Dore's mysterious recalcitrants. The facade was newly painted, the brickwork lined and pointed, the whole front freshly dolled up. The old gilded script *Plaza* sign was missing, and a great neon sprawled across in its place. The neon wasn't illuminated, but he caught its lettering as the Cadillac swept past: *Tenth Avenue Dormitorium.*

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"Stop," he snapped at his driver. "Wait here a bit." Getting out of the Cad, he went back, had another look at Embleton's place. The collapsible gate was across the main entrance but not locked at one end. Sounds of hammering reverberated from inside. Sliding the gate, Morgan went through, found a painter busily graining a pillar in the foyer, said to him, "Embleton anywhere around?"

"As I live," remarked a bland voice right behind him, "Mr. Morgan in person! To what do we owe this pleasure?"

He whirled around, stared right into those wide blue eyes that were becoming his pet irritation. "You!" he rumbled at Dan Dore. "What in hades are you doing here?"

Mr. Dore pulled at one ear, his expression verging on the infantile. "Oh, I'm merely giving Jack a hand. I go around them all as alterations near completion and help them make final adjustments. You'll be in the gutter soon."

"I see," said Morgan, not seeing at all. "Now maybe you'll—" His voice ended as if chopped off, his features went crimson, and he bawled, "Hey, what was that you just said about me?"

"Did I say anything about you?" Dan Dore rubbed his freckles, looked faintly amazed. "Good gracious!"

"About me being in the gutter," Morgan reminded him. He took a step forward, his attitude pugnacious.

"Ah, yes," mused Dan. "The inevitable fate of any man who refuses to admit that further improvement is possible. A pity, a great pity! It touches my conscience that I should have to compel an individual otherwise so talented to hawk shoelaces in the street."

"What?" bellowed Morgan. The painter dropped his brush, the hammering inside temporarily ceased.

"However," continued Dan, imperturbably, "the situation is not without a modicum of justice. You were most unkind to Miss Dreener although she served you faithfully and well. You were unnecessarily harsh with Miss Sweeting." The blue eyes filled themselves with pious reproach. "In fact, the opinion of many of your employees is that you are a rather cold and heartless man. As a human being, you bear a striking resemblance to a fish."

"A FISH," mouthed Morgan. He put one hand on the adjacent pillar to brace himself. The paint was wet, and the hand stuck, an incident that did nothing to help his pleasure.

"A fat fish," corrected Dan, as an afterthought. "You should diet, you know. I diagnose your case as one of inefficient digestion." He emitted a resigned sigh. "Yes, inefficiency—that's all I seem to encounter in these places far from Kalamazoo. It's a marvel to me how you've all managed to survive."

"That settles it!" Morgan recovered rapidly. His ire evaporated, he became visibly pleased about something. "It's what I've always thought. You're a nuthead. You're just plain, incurably daffy. All I've got to do is wait for the crash and watch the goon squad rope you in."

"Bless my soul!" said Dan.

"Heaven alone knows," went on Morgan, "how you've managed to dig up all the suckers you've got with you, but I'm old enough and sinful enough to know that Barnum made a grave underestimate." He cackled gratingly. "Go ahead, pal. Go right ahead and try to smash the movie trade. I'll come along and gloat when they toss your pants in the clink."

"Dear me," said Dan, "how sadistic of you."

"Dormitorium bunk!" continued

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Morgan, thoroughly enjoying himself. "When you're breaking rocks I'll buy your halls for the price of the bricks."

"Well," put in Dan, charmingly, "that leaves us all happy; you in the gutter and me in the . . . er . . . clink. So pleased to have met you again, Mr. Morgan. I'm sure you'll pardon me leaving, but I'm very busy even if you aren't."

"Hey - hey!" chuckled Morgan. "Uncle Sam'll keep you a damnsight busier!" With that, he went out, got into the Cadillac, had a last look through the rear window at the *Tenth Avenue Dormitorium*. He said to his chauffeur, "Slugs, back there's a crazy guy who thinks he can add to movies something more than sounds, smells, colors and three-dim effect. Can you think of any improvement?"

"Naw, chief, they ain't nuttin," quoth Slugs. His hairy hands clenched about the wheel, his small eyes squinted with the unusual strain of thinking. "Only t'ing I'd like'd be a movie where Gloria Sweetin' snaked right outa the screen an' sat in me lap."

"Sweeting's a ham," defined Morgan. "I could think of tastier lumps, myself."

THE storm broke Monday, September 20. All the dailies carried long articles eulogizing dormitoriums, the twentieth century climax of entertainment, the great successor to the movies. None of the articles gave any hint of the technique employed in these mysterious halls, but all were well calculated to excite the curiosity of the public in general and of critics and independent exhibitors in particular. Each paper ran a full-page advertisement:

YOUR LOCAL DORMITORIUM
OPENS TONIGHT
WITH
MANHATTAN NOCTURNE

Morgan took Crait around in the Cadillac to the *Park Dormitorium* which stood alongside the M. P. S. *Coliseum*. The latter bore its usual poster telling the world that all M. P. S. creations had color, sounds, smell and were completely stereoscopic. The new rival displayed a matching poster which read:

Every Dore Epic Means
Self-Participation!

"Baloney!" scoffed Morgan. He frowned at the long queue leading to the newcomer's box-office, frowned more deeply as he noted the deserted air of the *Coliseum*. "You get out, Mark, and hang around. The first mob'll be out in half an hour or so. Find out if they were actually given *Manhattan Nocturne*, and then phone through to me. One show's enough—after that I'm gonna skin 'em!"

He rolled back to the lot, waited in his huge office until a phone shrilled, picked it up and said, "That you, Mark?"

"Boss," yelped Crait, "they've come out and I talked to some guys who'd seen *Manhattan Nocturne* and they said it was a wow and it'd make you forget your wooden leg and it's—"

"That'll do," cut in Morgan. He slapped the phone down on Crait's excited voice, smiled broadly, selected a cigar and lit it with an imperial air. Then he picked up the phone again, said to his operator, "Get me our lawyers."

The call went through. He rapped authoritatively, "Mulligan, you've heard about these here dormitoriums? Well, they've been showing their version of a book called *Manhattan Nocturne*. You've read it, huh? Anyway, we bought up the movie rights six months back." He listened, said, "Yeah, you got it. You sue the pants off them. Move fast and make it hot."

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He sat back, eyed the room grandly, blew cigar smoke around, felt supremely satisfied.

Crait charged in four hours later. His clothes were sloppy, his hair awry. The way he came up the carpet suggested that he was making a getaway with somebody's gold watch. He fell into a chair, mopped his forehead.

"Boss, we're sunk."

"Don't talk nutty," ordered Morgan.

"It's a fact, boss. Our shares are down so far you can't use 'em to buy hamburgers. If I gave a month's pay for our outfit I'd owe everything to my mother." He panted heavily, mopped the forehead once more. "I been in the dormitorium. I got inquisitive and went in. It's the apex, the acme, the peak, the word after the last word! You go see for yourself."

"Huh?"

"You go see," persisted Crait. "This Dore's put us back in the dark ages. We're dumped in the museum along with them hairy fellers in the coonskin belly-muffs."

"You been drinking, Mark?" asked Morgan, severely. He bent his brows at the other.

"I ain't touched a drop although I could do with plenty right now." He gave a sour laugh. "As I came in I saw Flaherty trundling the Number Two big camera toward the Swiss Village. Poor guy, he doesn't know it, but he was lugging junk around." Crait waved a devastating hand. "They're gonna bury us with all that stuff just like they did King Tut."

"Mark!" Emory Morgan arose in all his imposing magnificence. He was royally shocked.

"You go see," invited Crait, adding, with unexpected spirit, "You ain't scared, unh?"

"I'll go and see," pronounced Morgan. "I'll go see for myself." He mashed his cigar in a tray, frowned deeply at the moody Crait, went out.

INSIDE, the dormitorium proved to be much like an ordinary cinema except that there wasn't any stereoscopic screen, and the long rows of tip-up seats had been replaced by wider rows of deep, luxurious armchairs. Morgan estimated that this latter refinement reduced the capacity of the house by at least twenty percent. An attractive usherette conducted him to one of the armchairs, he sank into its soft, embracing depths, looked around.

The place was full, with plenty more waiting outside for the next performance. For some reason he couldn't fathom, those who were running the place weren't giving a continuous show, but a series of separate and distinct houses, letting each successive audience see the programme right through then clearing the hall in readiness for the next lot. They were not admitting late comers, either. And they didn't allow any standing. You had to be in your seat at the start or else wait a couple of hours outside for the next performance. Also, they were unusually strict about smoking.

In front, where the screen should have been, hung a huge sheet of fine, closely woven wire that shone like polished copper. A similar sheet hung at the back of the dormitorium several feet behind the rearmost row of seats. Below the front sheet, softly illuminated by hidden lights, was the keyboard of a giant organ.

The doors closed, the usherettes faded into the side aisles, the lights dimmed. The giant organ stirred to life, played a soothing melody. A strange odor wafted through the hall, became stronger. It wasn't an attractive odor, yet neither was it unpleasant. The scent remained; the organ grew

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slumbersome in its lulling tones. The whole atmosphere bore an overwhelming suggestion of sleep, sleep, sleep.

Then with all the startling suddenness of an unheralded miracle, Morgan found himself face to face with Carlotta Clair, the raven-haired heroine of *Manhattan Nocturne*. He wasn't amazed by the meeting, in fact it seemed to him the most natural of all events. She was vibrant, beautiful, alive—and she loved him. He, Harry Reordon—not Emory Morgan, not Emory Morgan, but Harry Reordon—young, handsome, burly and fascinating, could feel Carlotta's infatuation, see it in her glorious eyes. And he loved her, loved her like hell. She knew that, knew it because he told her so. He enjoyed the pressure and the taste of her carmine lips upon his own, the soft yielding of her slender body as he embraced her in farewell.

SHE was leaving him for ever, leaving him to marry that dirty, misbegotten skunk who had a hold upon her father. He couldn't bear the thought of it, felt the fierce resentment boiling up within his chest, felt the grim, dogged determination to smash the whole rotten set-up and regain Carlotta for his own. Her fragrance was tantalizing in his nostrils, her deep, black eyes held the tiniest hint of tears. He could not let her go like this.

Fragilely, she swayed toward him, whispered in her low, warm voice, "Harry, I'll always think of you."

He scowled upward at the mighty spires of Manhattan, immense monuments over the graves of a thousand hopes, and his jaw stuck out as he said, rather melodramtically, "Carlotta, there are still a few weeks. There still is hope." He bunched his fists until the knuckles whitened. "Don't worry, darling. Be brave! I'll beat Old Man Time to the altar yet!"

She smiled sadly and left him. Thus it went on. He, Harry Reordon, handsome and heroic, bust Manhattan wide open in the requisite time. The sweat of anxiety poured down his spine as he made his getaway from pursuing black sedans with drawn side-curtains. His stomach shrank to a small, hard ball when he made that daredevil leap off Brooklyn Bridge. He thrilled like a kid at every surreptitious meeting with Carlotta. He suffered agonies when they framed him, became defiant and courageous all through that long court case, was immensely gratified by the plaudits of the crowd when finally he vindicated himself and drove the rats out of town.

Then the wedding with Carlotta. Her beautiful gown, her shining eyes, the admiration of the great crowd of spectators, a-a-ah! And the excitement within his breast as he knew that now the world was his oyster. He slipped the ring on her finger. She tilted her face for the nuptial kiss. Her lips were warm and soft and moist, her cheeks like velvet, her eyelashes long, graceful. She was his! She was bliss!

At that point a half-dazed and thoroughly excited Emory Morgan found himself sprawling in his seat, his eyes staring blankly before him. He didn't even see the copper cathode above the keyboard of the organ. The lights were waxing once more, the organ began to play a lively, stirring tune. People moved all around, languidly gathering gloves and handbags, moving out. He had a funny feeling deep down inside him, a feeling as of one completely satiated with emotional experience, a sense of glandular satisfaction. Lazily, he got up, went out of the dormitorium.

HE WAS introspective all the way home, still soberly thoughtful at

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his office next morning. The lawyers phoned through, told him it was a waste of time to sue Mr. Dore because that gentleman had purchased for a thousand bucks the right to emotionalize *Manhattan Nocturne,* and he took it like a lamb. Crait came in at ten, his air that of a professional mourner.

"Did you see it, boss?"

"Yeah." Morgan fiddled with a silver pencil, looked around with eyes decidedly worried. Somehow, the great room was dull and empty, not half as imposing as it used to be. Even the desk had lost some of its polish. "Mark, I hate like hell to say it—but I reckon we're on the way out."

"Sure, boss, that's what I think."

"I never thought I'd live to see the day when the movie business got poured down the sink, but this is it!" He scuffled the pencil around, didn't notice his cigars. "What that mule-skinner from Kalamazoo has discovered is something mighty near to reality. Hell, I could even taste Carlotta Clair's lipstick. It was cherry."

"It was mandarine," contradicted Crait.

"It was cherry. I know, because that's my favorite."

"Mandarine's mine—that's how I know," Crait persisted.

They stared at each other, then Morgan went on. "I can't make out how in hades he's done it, but it looks to me mighty like controlled dreaming, and you can bet he's protected his methods in law—especially seeing that electrical gang of bandits've got their fingers in the pie."

"Yup," endorsed Crait, "he's got us by the short hairs. So where do we go from here?"

"God knows," said Morgan, gloomily. It was then that he surprised Crait by revealing a hidden side of his character. "I'm all right. I can always go back to the old racket and fight my way up again. But what about the others, hundreds, thousands of 'em? What're they gonna do? What about the little guys who've staked us with hard-earned dough?"

"It'll be hell on them," said Crait, waggling his eyebrows as if he couldn't believe what he'd heard. "They're slated for a long spell on crusts and ditch water."

Still twiddling his pencil, Morgan said, "If I could carry them all, I'd do it, but there're too many of them." The phone yelled, he picked it up disinterestedly, listened. His beefy face darkened, and he shouted, "To hell with him!" He went on listening while the phone squeaked rapidly against his unwilling ear. After a while, he growled resignedly, "Oh, all right. Show him in." He forked the phone. "Dore."

"What, is that bum pestering you again?"

"Yeah. Beat it, Mark, and leave me to deal with him."

DAN DORE made his entry with the same bland assurance as before, struggled through the carpet, paused halfway and said, chidingly, "You ought to plant an oasis just here." He reached the desk, hitched himself onto a corner, bestowed an infantile grin upon the glowering Morgan.

"Well?" Morgan rapped.

"You're the unhappy victim of a sort of ultra short-wave radio," Dan informed. "Actually, it's an adjoining pair of telepathic bands. One belongs to males, the other to females. When you're experimenting with electro-magnetic impulses you don't expect sex to rear its ugly head, do you?"

"I don't," growled Morgan, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Now this dual band won't function effectively over a range greater than a

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mere seven hundred feet, but within that range it is potent in all directions. So if I use it in a dormitorium in the same manner as an ordinary transmitter I'm going to have the surrounding sidewalks littered with non-paying clients. To avoid this, I have to transmit on a sort of beam system, seating the audience in the path of a telepathic stream flowing from a big cathode to an equally big anode. Are you following me?"

"Yeah," said Morgan. "But what's it to me. Why can't you go trundle your hoop?"

"Patience, my bellicose friend." The blue eyes looked guileless, disarming. His freckles seemed bigger and more numerous than ever. "The technique is simple. I have two emotionalists in each dormitorium's equivalent of a projection room. One is male, the other female. Both are of the imaginative, literary type that never reads a book but rather enters it in person. I take their telepathic output, amplify it enormously, give the powerful product to the audience. It's too strong for any of them to resist, and even the dullest of them emotes like he never did before." His chuckle was loud. "You ought to watch an audience sometime. All the men lash out in their sleep when the hero lands the villain a belt in the lugs; all the ladies pout their lips and sigh ecstatically in the terminating love scene."

"I know it," growled Morgan. "I've had some."

"I'm trading in created dreamlands," continued Dan Dore. "Anyone who's had a really vivid dream knows how vividly real a dream can be. While the novelty lasts, the effect is good enough to suit everyone. Do you comprehend me?"

"I ain't a cretin."

"Quite! You wouldn't be cretinous enough to maintain that there's no more room for improvement in dormitorium technique?"

"Well . . . well—" Morgan hesitated, fidgeted uneasily.

"LISTEN!" ordered Dan. "What imperfection lies within our broadcast dreams is due mostly to the mental strain put upon the professional emotionalists while they visualize and animate the printed story."

"So?"

"So their task would be far easier, more polished, better co-ordinated, their responses more detailed and realistic if they watched a movie version of a book."

"Eh?" Morgan sat up. His hands weren't quite steady.

"In other words, the movie trade can give me greater clarity, I can give the movies intense realism. We can assist each other. You'd have to turn out home-size films and we'd have to install a miniature projector in every translation room of a dormitorium, but that's no bother." The childish eyes went severe. "Are you prepared to help, without any commercial wrangling, and permitting us free selection from your output?"

Morgan contorted his face, said, "I am."

"That's fine! If you're prepared to operate with some degree of efficiency, and turn out praiseworthy stuff, we won't turn any of it down."

They shook hands on it, and Dan went out. Morgan sat at his desk a long, long time. Then he dug up a cigar. The flame wavered as he lit it. The room wasn't looking so bad after all, and the desk had a beautiful polish. He wondered whether there was an improved cigar on the market.

The phone rang, he picked it up, a familiar voice said, "I forgot to men-

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tion that you'll have to arrange for selection by giving all previews in Kalamazoo."

"Yeah," agreed Morgan, "sure!" He made sure the phone was properly cradled before he bawled, "I'd like to blow that goddam burg clean off the map!"

From the distant door, Crait said, "Which place, boss?"

"Slumber Dump, Michigan," snapped Morgan, and mashed his cigar which somehow tasted as if it could be bettered. He selected another.

« DEATH'S CHILLING VOICE »

OVER a century ago, George Washington had a severe chill before he died of pneumonia. The people who do not take care of colds have a tragic example confronting them in the death of the Father of his Country.

The great general undoubtedly hastened his end by not removing his wet clothes when he returned home from riding over his estate in the rain at the beginning of his fatal illness. When the cold had settled in his throat, producing hoarseness, he persisted in using his voice in reading aloud, thus doing the very thing that would tend to increase the congestion and intensify the inflammation of the parts particularly affected.

All information available leads to the belief that the malady responsible for his death was an acute inflammatory edema of the larynx, an affliction which attacks the tissue lying beneath the mucous membrane. It is characterized by painful swelling of the larynx, causing great difficulty and pain in swallowing. Diphtheria, acute laryngitis and pneumonia may easily follow these symptoms.

Today physicians know why fatal pneumonia starts with a chill. Chilling of the body surface causes a slight contraction of the epiglottis, the lid-like valve that closes the upper end of the windpipe during swallowing and prevents food particles and liquids from going down. With this vital valve reduced to a poor fit, fluids from the nose, mouth and upper part of the throat can get down into the lungs, carrying with them pneumonia germs that have accumulated in those entryways to the outer world. If there is an irritated condition in the lungs, as from a cough already started, pneumonia is likely to follow.

At the present time the operation of opening the trachea to allow the direct ingress of air to the lungs would be performed. There is a chance but not a certainty that it would save the patient's life.

Washington's physicians cannot be blamed for not performing this operation because its use in such cases did not have the indorsement of the medical authorities of the day.

« UNSOLVED FRACTION »

THE fact that pernicious anemia patients are kept alive and well by continually eating liver or taking liver extracts does not depend on any single chemical substance contained in liver.

Liver's effectiveness depends on a mixture of three active substances, two of which have been obtained in pure crystalline form.

Scientists have been attemping to locate the chemical substance in liver responsible for its healing effect on pernicious anemia ever since they discovered the liver treatment. Although potent liver extracts are now available for pernicious anemia patients, if the active substance in liver could be found, it might be made in the laboratory, as many other medicines are, instead of having to be extracted from liver itself.

Chemical treatment has yielded three substances from liver, known to scientists as "fractions," which have been found to have an effect on the blood-cell-forming organs of both patients and guinea pigs. However, the anemia-relieving potency was lost in the course of chemical purification of the "fractions." Two of the "fractions" have been obtained in crystalline form and the chemical composition of one of them determined. A mixture of all three of these "fractions" is highly effective as a remedy for pernicious anemia; separately they have no effect on the disease.

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A JULES VERNE FANTASY

by JACK WEST

Jules Verne invented the modern submarine in his imagination. It is the classic "fantasy come true"

SOME seventy years ago, when Jules Verne first thought of the submarine in his book *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* little did the people of that day dream that huge sea monsters would someday roam the depths like so many wolves. Least of all, Jules Verne never intended that the submarine become a tool of war. He had always thought of it as an efficient means of ocean transportation, more efficient than traveling on the surface. Yet, since its inception, the submarine has scarcely been used for anything but warfare.

Among the first records of a submarine being used in warfare is that of the Confederate submarine "David," so named after her inventor. In 1863 the Confederates in Charleston sent their submarine after a Federal squadron only to have their craft sink from under them, dragging their crews to death. On the fourth try, however, the much salvaged "David" managed to blow up the *Housatonic,* but was not able to get away. This time the "David" and her crew were blown into limbo.

In 1885 America began seriously to consider the question of submarines for her navy. She invited a Swede named Nordenfelt and an American named J. P. Holland to submit designs. Nordenfelt designed several boats that were driven by steam. Upon diving, the funnel had to be taken down, the fires put out, and the reserve steam used to drive the boat while submerged. Actually submerging was accomplished by drawing water into ballast-tanks and operating a series of horizontal propellers, one on each side of the boat. By this process the boat was literally pushed into the water in a manner similar to an elevator descending from the heights of a skyscraper, straight down and straight up. Nordenfelt was convinced that no submarine could descend or ascend at an angle.

Nordenfelt's boat was a failure mainly because of her lack of stability. Any slight swaying made the water in her boilers and ballast-tanks surge violently to and fro, and this immediately started the ship off on a kind of drunken spree that more than once endangered the crew. So precarious was Nordenfelt's submarine that when she fired her first torpedo she nearly stood vertically on her tail; while the unexpected wash from a nearby boat, as she was about to descend, filled her open conning-tower with water, causing her to sink like a stone. Only the quick action of the crew in blowing out her ballast-water restored her buoyancy and enabled her

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to rise to the surface.

IN violent disagreement with Nordenfelt's ideas was the American inventor, J. P. Holland. His ship was designed to descend and ascend at an angle as an airplane does. Ballast tanks are used, but once the submarine weighs as much as the water around it, it can dive and come to the surface by using only its elevators. At this point the English government, recognizing the value of Holland's inventon, asked him to come to Britain and design a British submarine fleet.

The first submarines Holland designed for the British were powered with gasoline motors, but this practice was soon discontinued because gasoline gives off deadly fumes in a closed chamber, and causes explosions. The diesel engine was the answer to Holland's problem. Its heavy crude oil would not burn or explode, was excellent ballast, and easy to handle.

Almost every year since those early submarine days at the turn of the century has brought improvements in submarine design. Along with advances in the design of diesel motors came better storage batteries. The diesel engine propels the boat while on the surface and also drives the dynamo which generates electricity which is stored for use when submerged. Most submarine experts are convinced that the storage battery and the diesel engine are the two inventions that have made the modern submarine possible. Compressed air proved inadequate for the speed required of a submarine. Steam required a large cargo of coal that upon use affected the boat's equilibrium. No matter how careful the calculations as to ballast water to compensate for coal burned, no one knew exactly when the coal was burned completely. Oil is burned instantly and easily compensated for.

The first submarines were as blind as a bat while running submerged. Furthermore, electric currents in and about the steel hull made navigation by compass next to impossible. The periscope has given the submarine eyes, and the gyroscope compass keeps it on her course. (Some fifty years ago Lewis Nixon, head of a submarine company, applied for a patent on a rotating telescope which would enable submarines to see above the surface of the water while running submerged. His patent was blocked because a description of such a device is in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* published twenty years earlier.)

In construction the modern submarine looks like a huge metal fish. In its center is a sort of bridge known as the conning tower. This conning tower is protected with armored steel and lighted by windows through which the navigating officer can see his course while running half submerged. On early submarines the conning tower hatch led directly into the bowels of the submarine. However, several horrible accidents caused by open conning tower hatches led to the double hatch system now used. Should the sea break over the first hatch, it still would fail to penetrate the second hatch and get into the vulnerable interior of the ship. But in the case of an accident, the sailor on lookout is caught between the two hatches; yet, strangely enough, the lookout usually escapes alive while his companions often drown.

ONE of the most unusual of all submarine feats was that of the *Deutschland,* a German cargo-carrying sub that operated between this country and Germany during World War I. This sub was built for the sole purpose of transporting valuable supplies from this

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country to Germany in spite of the British blockade.

The *Deutschland* was able to sneak by a literal maze of British patrol boats, mines, nets, etc., in the North Sea and English Channel, and make two successful voyages to this country and return. Even the toughest of English sea dogs admired the guts of the *Deutschland's* crew, because they knew the English Channel was a groping mass of steel submarine nets. Once a sub fouls her rudders or propeller in a net, she must either come to the surface to be captured, or else if she cannot rise, the crew faces certain death by drowning or suffocation.

The *Deutschland* carried no guns or torpedo-tubes. Her length was about 300 feet, breadth 30 feet, and depth of hull, 17 feet. In order to completely submerge she required water over 30 feet deep. In general overall appearance she looked a good deal like the whaleback steamers you see on the Great Lakes. A narrow deck about six feet wide, tapering at the ends, extended from bow to stern at a height of about two feet above the curved hull. The navigating bridge, located near the center of the boat, was about 25 feet above the water when the vessel was running on the surface. The *Deutschland's* hull consisted of two shells, an outer and an inner. The outer hull was an oval in cross-section, and gave the boat its ship-shaped form, providing better streamlining. The inner hull was circular and was so designed to withstand high water pressures when the boat was running submerged.

Unique too was the interior arrangement of the *Deutschland*. Since absolutely no armament was carried, virtually all of the interior space used for these devices was used for cargo. The total cargo capacity was 600 tons. When on the surface the *Deutschland* was driven by two, 600 h.p. diesel engines that pushed the ship along at a top speed of 18 knots. When submerged the huge ship was driven by electric motors, drawing their power from several hundred storage batteries. Her maximum underwater speed was 12 knots. In her first trip from Bremen to Baltimore, she took only sixteen days, slightly less than the twenty days required by an average freighter. The *Deutschland's* crew consisted of three officers and twenty-three men.

GRAY-HAIRED, 75-year-old, Simon Lake, designer of the first submarine to operate successfully on the open sea, about a year ago suggested that this country build a fleet of 100 cargo carrying subs. Built at a cost of only 200 million dollars, these subs, according to Lake, could run any blockade with almost complete security. "Each of the submarines would carry cargoes of 7,500 tons," Lake explained. "They would cost only slightly more than surface vessels of equal capacity."

Lake explains that today's submarines can be provisioned by undersea supply vessels. That is, it is possible for other submarines to transfer oil and ammunition while still under the surface! In other words, the modern sub doesn't have to return to its base for the entire duration of the war, merely coming to the surface at night to replenish its supply of air. Of course, such a situation is not likely, but it is most certainly possible.

A few other startling facts: World War I subs fired torpedoes carrying only 500 lbs. of TNT. Today torpedoes can be built to carry 10,000 lbs. of TNT. The modern sub can locate its prey by means of high frequency beams which permit it to fire a torpedo without coming to the surface. Super sensitive radio hearing devices enable it to

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hear the approach of any surface vessel within the astonishing area of 100 square miles, or within a radius of five miles. In short, says Lake, today's sub can remain absolutely silent, motionless, invisible, lurking in the bottom of the sea, capable of seeing, hearing, locating, any vessel above it.

According to the last available report, the largest sub ever built is the British X-1. This enormous ship is designed to accompany the battle fleet in the character of a submarine destroyer, ready at an instant's notice to dive and attack the enemy's line with torpedoes; and for secondary use in long range reconnaissance and patrol.

Driven by two diesels at a surface speed of 22 knots (about 24 m.p.h.), the X-1 has enough speed to accompany a battle fleet into action. Her underwater speed is estimated at 10 knots. She has a displacement of 3,600 tons, four 12-inch guns, and carries a crew of 120 men.

Reports seeping out of Germany just before the war reveal that Professor Oswald Flamm, one of the ablest of German naval architects, who took a prominent part in the construction of the World War I U-boat flotilla, had completed designs for a submarine cruiser of 7,067 tons surface displacement, a length of 403 feet, and a 49-foot beam. The conning tower and all those parts of the ship exposed while running on the surface are plated with 5-inch armor, amounting to a total weight of 614 tons. The German sub can store enough fuel oil for a voyage of 22,000 sea miles, or almost around the world. Flamm's giant sub can cruise at 12 knots and requires a crew of a hundred men who can submerge the vessel in one minute.

AN American sub of the Barracuda class displaces 2,500 tons, carries a crew of 75 at 19 knots on the surface and 8 knots submerged. These subs are 326 feet long, carry one 3-inch anti-aircraft gun, six 21-inch torpedo tubes, and 16 torpedoes. They are driven by electric motors from power supplied by two diesels of 6,700 h.p. while cruising on the surface, and by storage batteries when submerged. Barracuda class subs can cruise more than 12,000 miles without a stop and cost close to eight million dollars.

The smallest subs in use are those of the Japs. One of these recently captured off the island of Oahu during the memorable raids on Pearl Harbor revealed a midget craft of 41-foot length with provisions for a crew of only two. The Jap sea termites have a cruising radius of about 200 miles at low speed, have only electric motors, and carry two 18-inch torpedoes. The Jap sea midgets carry 300 lbs. of explosive wired to a battery. In this manner the suicide Jap crew are supposed to sneak their sub under an unwary vessel and blast both themselves and their enemy vessel into kingdom come. These underwater mites have yet to prove their worth.

Nonetheless, these sea midgets carry a complete complement of equipment. Such equipment includes: gyro-compass, magnetic compass, radio equipment, underwater sound and listening devices, and enough electrical power from batteries to make 24 knots. The periscope projects five feet above the top of the conning tower. The hull is constructed of one-quarter inch plate, divided into five compartments, two of which are occupied by electric batteries.

The two worst enemies of the submarine are the depth charge and electrical listening devices. A depth charge, released by a destroyer or airplane, exploding within a hundred feet of a sub, will crush its sides. Electrical listening

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devices used on subchasers are similar to electrical altimeters used on aircraft in their operation. They send out a constant beam that is instantly reflected back when it strikes a metal object. Two such beams emanating from the bow and stern of a single destroyer give the exact location of any sub within a radius of ten miles. Once the sub is located the area is completely blasted with depth charges until an oil slick or bits of debris give evidence of a sunk sub. An old trick of sub commanders is the release of oil and debris in an effort to make the enemy think they have been mortally damaged. Now, U. S. sailors only fall for an oil slick when it is big enough to cover a city block.

Sub commanders as a group dislike glassy-calm weather, because it shows up periscopes with a white plume when running submerged. Ideal sub weather calls for a slight chop with waves about three feet high. Very rough weather can be avoided by subs by running submerged, but firing torpedoes in this weather is far from accurate. To use its periscope the average sub must rise to within 20 to 30 feet of the surface. In this position the sub is in great danger of being rammed, sunk by depth charges, or spotted by aircraft and sunk by bombs. Once hit a sub sinks rapidly because it has very little reserve buoyancy. Hatchways to the deck are few and far between and they are rarely opened. Even the stoutest of seaman admit that sub crews are made of the toughest stuff.

In this country as in Britain, service on submarines is on a voluntary basis, yet there always has been a waiting list. Navy men, serving on sub duty, get from five to thirty dollars additional each month, depending on their qualifications and duties. In Germany sub duty at the closing of World War I was compulsory. The Allies took advantage of this fact by refusing to publish any information concerning the sinkings of subs. From the German point of view the subs just went to sea and disappeared never to be heard of again. This so demoralized the crews at the end of three years that many of them were shot for desertion.

Sub scientists believe that World War II may bring many new advancements in sub design. Already James Hogg, an Alhambra, Cal. inventor, has a working model of a 4,000 ton sub that will be able to release 2,000 tons of highly inflammable fuel, which will rise to the surface and burst into a 50-foot sheet of raging flame consuming all ships and harbor facilities over a tremendous area, while the submarine itself would remain immune to the flames.

So far the Allies have never had great occasion to use their submarine fleet—a fleet that equals in quality and quantity that of the Axis. But now the acid test is near. American and British subs must bear the brunt of sinking no small part of the Jap fleet. To do this will mean submarines and more submarines at eight million dollars apiece; so buy defense bonds and stamps now!

«« MURDEROUS HAIL STORMS »»

THOUGH hailstones of large size frequently fall in the United States, it is not often that people are killed by hail here. But India frequently has hail of sufficient size and violence to kill people.

On April 30, 1888, a remarkable storm occurred in a region about 100 miles east of Delhi. Nearly 250 persons were killed, principally by the hail. In a near-by district 16 more persons were killed by hailstones during the same storm.

One day during the summer of 1930, hailstones falling in Greece killed 20 persons and injured more than 40.

—*Walter Martin.*

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CANCER—

THE FANTASTIC

by A. MORRIS

The mystery of cancer still baffles medical science. What makes these cells run wild?

FOR reasons we do not as yet understand, certain unfortunate cells are being suffocated for lack of oxygen. As a rule such cells die. Some, however, struggling for life, find another way to get energy. But in so doing, they keep multiplying without end, and a cancer results which finally brings death to the whole organism. This is no theory, but a comprehensive summary of all the data at present available.

Mice cancers are almost identical with those of men in types, organs involved, and clinical course, according to Miss Maud Slye, of the Otho Sprague Memorial Institute, who is one of the foremost authorities on the subject. The development of a tumor at six months is an early cancer age in mice, approximately the equivalent of thirty years, an early age, in man. The percentage of tumors which have arisen in Maud's mice is about ten per cent, almost the same as in the human species.

Cancer apparently depends also upon certain elements which effect the growth of an individual. The miserable little mouse down with other diseases cannot develop cancer though she live through the cancer age and come from a susceptible strain, because in the weakened condition she has not enough strength to support such growths. The more vigorous the susceptible mouse is, the more apt is it to develop a cancer. In addition, cancerous growths often appear at the time when the body is growing rapidly.

In 1927, Miss Slye reported that many hundreds of breast cancers under constant observation in her stocks were known to have arisen synchronously with beginning pregnancy. It is most interesting to note then, that concurrently with general bodily growth and the growth of an accessory blood system, blood supply, the breast tissues and their secretions, there is also a stimulus for the beginning of breast cancer in breast-cancer-susceptible females. However, when the embryo starts developing it takes precedence over all other growths, and as a result tumor growth is arrested.

CANCER localization, which has been proved in mice, is believed by many to be true also of human cancer. Dr. Charles H. Mayo, the eminent American surgeon, cited the case of a brother and sister who were patients in his hospital at the same time with cancer of the ascending colon. The mother and one sister in the same family had suffered from cancer in the same exact spot of the colon. Another doctor observed cancer of the left breast in a mother and all of her five daughters. Still another case is a cancer of the

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uterus found in a mother, her daughter, and her granddaughter. And many are familiar with the clinical record of the Bonaparte family, Napoleon, his mother, sister, and brother all died of a stomach cancer. Similar tissues derived in the course of evolution from the same ancestry must respond in the same way to the same type of irritation.

Evidently the metabolism or functioning of the cell holds the key to the riddle of the anarchy of cancer growth, just as it does of normal growth. To discover this secret, Otto Warburg of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Biology in Berlin started in 1924 an amazing series of experiments on the metabolism of normal and wild cells. He cut thin slices from human and mouse tumors and quickly placed them in an apparatus, ingeniously devised by him, to study their reactions with sugar.

He found that the normal cell burns or oxidizes this sugar with oxygen that it is able to obtain. A minute amount of gas is liberated during the process; this volume of gas can be measured. The cancer cell, on the other hand, cannot, for some unknown reason, get enough oxygen to oxidize the sugar and so it attacks the sugar in a different way and thus produces the energy it needs. It breaks it down into simpler compounds, just as yeast breaks sugar down into carbon dioxide gas and alcohol. Warburg's conclusion, after six years of first-class work which helped win for him the Nobel Prize, was that interference with the respiration in the normal growing cell is from the standpoint of the physiology of metabolism the cause of tumors.

WE have no certain diagnostic test of cancer today, with the exception of those which deal with cancer already well under way, or those which are far from dangerous, such as skin cancer. But if we have no warning, we have nevertheless three modern tools which have saved thousands of men and women from premature death. The knife, radium, and radiation from X-ray tubes are still the only cures for cancer. The knife of Hippocrates, who gave us the name cancer from the Latin word meaning crab, may have been a sharp one, and the skill great, yet today the surgeon equipped with modern aids can go deeper and probe vital spots more successfully than ever before.

One of the first applications of Madame Curie's discovery of radium was its use in the treatment of cancer. The element radium gives off powerful, penetrating rays which destroy some cancerous tissues, or at least arrest their further growth. Radium finds its greatest practical use in this field.

The X-ray machine produces a somewhat different type of radiation from that spontaneously emitted by the element radium. The use of the X-ray for cancer treatment began soon after its discovery by Roentgen in 1895. Forty years of improvement have changed the small, crude X-ray tube into mighty guns. These giant machines shoot filtered rays which pass flesh and bones to the depths of the body. Larger and more powerful tubes are still being built.

The General Electric Company recently constructed an 800,000 volt X-ray tube for the Mercy Hospital of Chicago. This new engine is a two-sectional cathode tube, fourteen feet long, with a four-inch tungsten target cooled by circulating twenty gallons of water around it each minute. It is doing the work of fifteen hundred grams of radium worth $75,000,000. Through a porthole in the ceiling of a lead-sheathed room, the operator aims the cathode stream at the cancer spot, watching the patient through a lead

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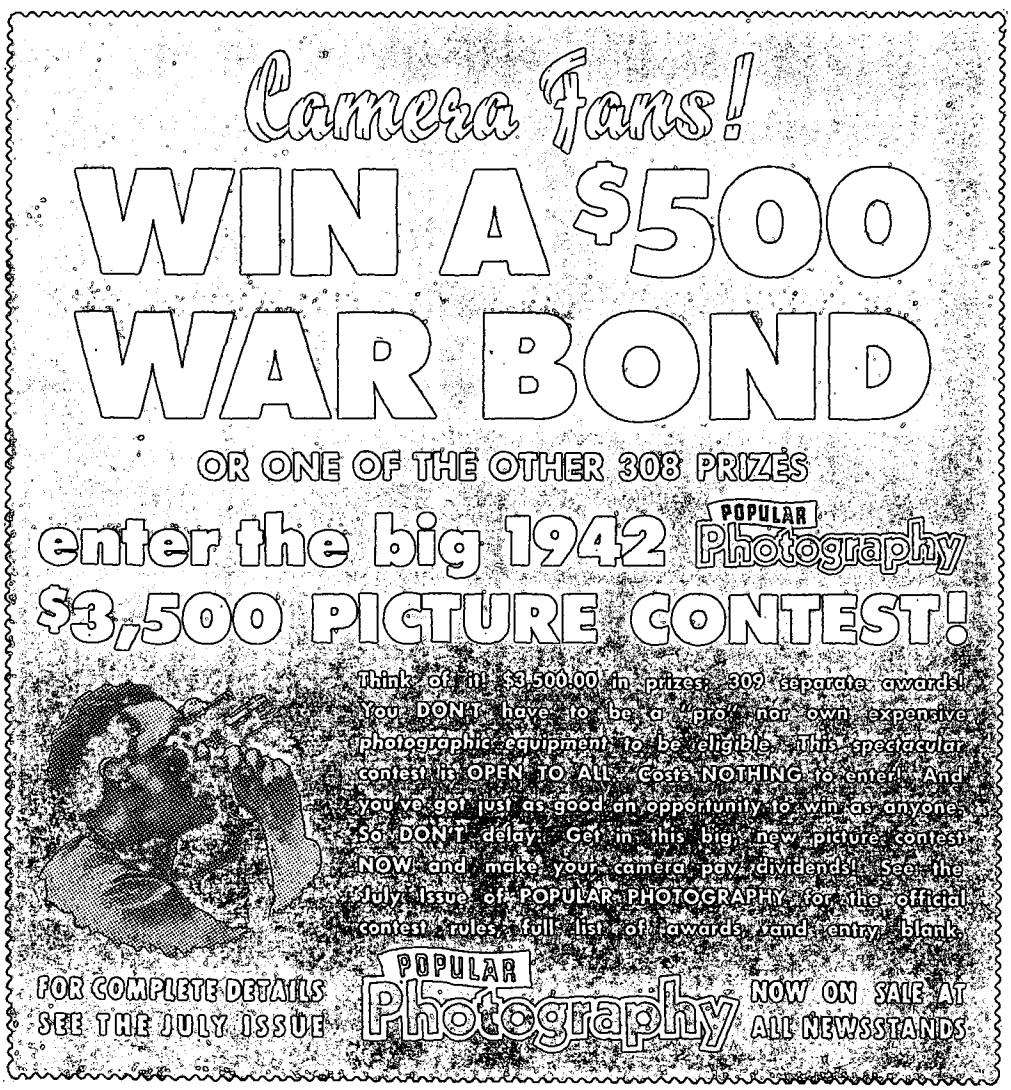
glass window. X-ray machines built to break down the atom are also being used to break down cancer cells.

The Kellogg Radium Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology has a still more powerful tube built with funds donated by W. K. Kellogg, the breakfast food king. This 1,200,000-volt X-ray tube is helping to penetrate the secrets of the subatomic world, and is also being used to save cancer patients from death.

Cancer is still the greatest of all the natural hazards in the adventure of living, but radium treatment, X-ray diagnosis and treatment, and especially the skillful use of the knife have done much to keep down the death rate from this dread disease. Earlier and more accurate diagnoses and prompt treatment are actually curing large numbers of cancers which a decade ago would have been fatal.

"Death from cancer of the skin, mouth, and cervix," declared Dr. Joseph C. Bloodgood of Johns Hopkins, "are largely due to ignorance. Continued

(Concluded on page 230)



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(Concluded from page 229)

medical and dental supervision will wipe them out, and save three thousand victims every year in this country alone." The outlook of the cancer patient is in many respects greatly improved, and the cure of at least fifty per cent of certain types of cancer cases lies in early diagnosis.

THE END

«« JUST ABOUT EELS »»

AND so he drove all the snakes from the "Emerald Isle" into the sea. Who? Why St. Patrick of course.

Ireland may not have any snakes, but her rivers contain the finest eels in Europe.

The eel, an odd fish that resembles the snake in appearance, is more appreciated across the oceans than in America. It is strange for we have fine eels of our own and though they require a special means of fishing to catch them and despite their queer looks they are quite good to eat. Smoked eel is a decided epicurean dish.

The life history of the eel, both European and American, is one of the strangest throughout the whole animal kingdom.

When they are ready to breed, both the European and American species of eels swim down the rivers to the sea and disappear. They migrate to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean near the West Indies where they produce their eggs and then die. The elvers, or young eels, do not resemble their parents in the least during the first few months of their lives, but slowly take on their typical elongated shape.

While they are slowly being transformed into "mature" eels, they have started their long underwater voyage to their ancestral streams. It is impossible to conjecture how these odd eels can travel those thousands of miles without a guide and in the total darkness of the subterranean depths. But somehow they do it, taking several years for the journey and at last come up the seaboard rivers.

—*Robert Fleming.*

A Beautiful Girl—A Wrecked Car!

They were the prelude to a HOMICIDE CALL! . . . There sprawled Stuart Gorham on the floor, a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. . . . We lined up all four suspects: the exquisite Lucy Gorham of the faked auto accident, respectable Cleveland Gorham, artistic John Farquhar, and weasel-like John Smith, burglar. All had alibis—*and every suspect's alibi was a bald-faced lie!* . . . It's thrilling, dangerous, fascinating, tracking down the desperately brutal murderer. And "Homicide Call" is but one of many great stories by your favorite mystery authors brought to you in the thrill-packed September issue.

Mammoth DETECTIVE

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JULY 1st—25c

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READER'S PAGE

ERROR

Sirs:

I regret to call your attention to such a trivial error, but in your November, 1941, issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES which appeared in the summer quarterly, the editor's footnote at the end of "Henry Horn's Super-solvent" contained a very noticeable inaccuracy. The article stated that when an aqueous solution of sodium chloride is electrolyzed, the products will be free hydrogen and oxygen. However, according to all informed sources, the products would be free hydrogen and chlorine.

I am sure that this was just an oversight on your part, but I could not resist calling your attention to it.

A STUDENT OF CHEMISTRY,
The University of Texas,
Austin, Texas.

Thanks for the correction. We'll ask Mr. Swain to answer.—Ed.

RAVE FOR MAGARIAN

Sirs:

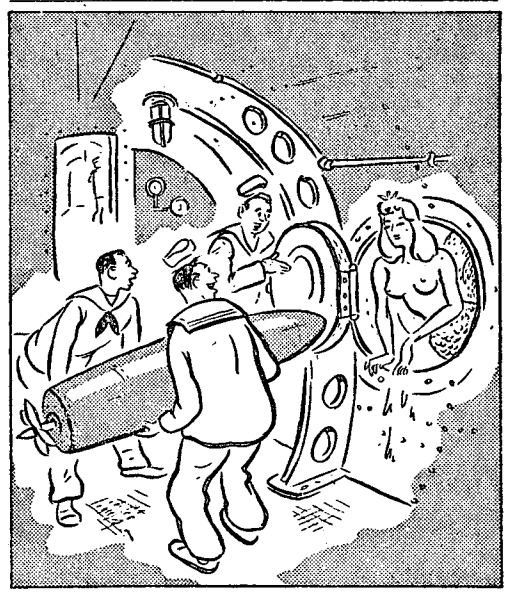
First of all, I want to rave over Magarian. His illustration for "Tink Takes a Fling" is the most exquisite thing outside of Disney work that I've ever seen. Next to Bok, Magarian is the finest story illustrator in the game. His illustrations have that delicate touch of whimsical fancy which is so utterly necessary in stories of that type. That tale would have been ruined by any other artist. Elsewhere—I really took notice of him in the story of the flute—he handles his subjects as if he were the originator of "the stuff of which dreams are made."

I've watched your mag come up through its successive stages, and I was sadly disappointed at first when it turned so huge, but I've reversed my judgment somewhat. If your stories can keep pace with the size (and so far it has, and they have), your position on the top of the heap is assured.

But comes it a complaint. Successively, you have run at least four stories about South and Central America, and three of those were concerned with the war. Frankly, we're about fed up with the Latin countries with their jungles and lost civilizations. Didja ever stop to think that the writers never seem to think of *a single story* which took place in Darkest Africa's jungles and its lost civilizations—minus Egypt? Even the Great Desert in Australia had its story about a lost people and the treasure stored there. And islands in the Pacific have come up and gone down so many times I'm beginning to think they do it at the command of the science-fiction writers! Could we please have a little less Latin America and a little more Europe or India, maybe?

Smith's cover — as usual — is very startling. The Green Man from Jupiter hits you in the eye like a Louis punch. What can one do but reach out a grimy paw and snatch it from the stands? What is most important, it depicts a scene from the story, which act is seldom found nowadays.

As for the stories themselves—Mr. Hibbard's Magic Hat; The Incredible Mr. Kismet; Tink Takes a Fling; Cupid Takes a Holiday; The Giant from Jupiter, although I don't like the way it ended; The Pied Piper Fights the Gestapo; The Skin-Deep Beauty; The Man Who Turned to Smoke; The Sun Doom—although the "right conquers might" moral stunk it up somewhat (or was Coblentz' tongue in his cheek when he wrote it?); Cassius Siddle's Great Illusion; The Quest in Time; Ebbtide Jones on the Warpath; The Battle of Manetong; they run in that order. I know no one agrees with me as to their merit, but fantastic adventures ought to be fantastic! The first four are really tops.



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Anyway, there's a place reserved for FA on my shelf.

BARBARA E. BOVARD,
1236½ Irolo Street,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Magarian will like you! And when it comes to India and Africa, we feel sure some of our writers will take your letter to heart, and give you what you want.—Ed.

WAR STORIES

Sirs:

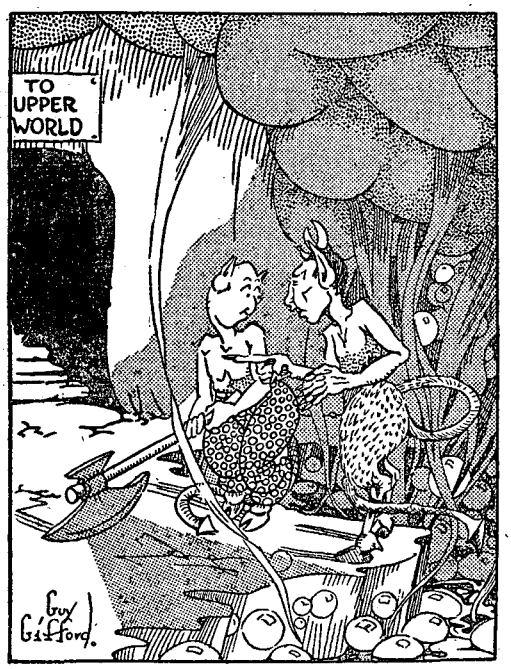
Hey!

The above refers to the June ish of FA. T'was good, yes, but after all! 13 great stories, not a one of 'em a stinkeroo—*BUT* no less than seven (7) stories were *war* yarns.

Don't get me wrong. I like stories about the war. And a yarn in science or fantasy fiction magazine is OK, but there's a limit to *everything!* Don't, dear Rap, *don't* go to the extreme.

The June cover—Hmmmm. Not as good as Smith's May cover (which was a honey), but better than some you've been putting out. The giant looked like a huge jade statue, and until I read the story, I thought it must be. The thing looked pasty and didn't look alive at all. But, boy oh boy, that speedboat was a beauty.

Interior illustrations were pretty good, the best being Magarian's for the Pied Piper yarn. Boy! I'm sorry to hear that you're losing the king of space-ship art to the Marines, but give 'em hell, Krupa.



"Watch these humans and when one wise-cracks, 'What's cooking?' let him have it!"

Now to the stories—

1. THE QUEST IN TIME. I never saw a bad Hamilton yarn yet. I'll take all of his stories you can dish out! 2. CUPID TAKES A HOLIDAY. Different, to say the least. 3. THE PIED PIPER FIGHTS THE GESTAPO. Not *quite* as good as the first two Feep escapades, but a swell story. 4. THE GIANT FROM JUPITER. Pretty good yarn. Nothing super-special about it. 5. TINK TAKES A FLING. 6. THE INCREDIBLE MR. KISMIT. OK for a humorous writer. Good story. BATTLE OF MANETONG. Whoops! McGivern's good anytime for my money. THE MAN WHO TURNED TO SMOKE. Good, but there wasn't enough explanation. How did the chemicals affect him like they did? 7. THE SUN DOOM. Hmmm. Satire. MR. HIBBARD'S MAGIC HAT. Good, but I like Cabot on novelets better. CASSIUS SIDDLE'S GREAT ILLUSION. More by Yale Kenny. (That's a pen name, of course?) EBB-TIDE JONES ON THE WAR-PATH. OK. Even if it was a war yarn, it was good. THE SKIN DEEP BEAUTY. I never did care for Swain, nor do I intend to, but it was a good story, just the same.

GENE HUNTER,
616 E. McCarty Ave.,
Jefferson City, Mo.

We'll try not to overload you on war stories, but we think they make pretty swell subject matter for new plots and real action.—Ed.

PAIN IN THE BRAIN

Sirs:

I've been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories* for almost two years and I think they're both great. I'm very much in favor of the new enlarged editions.

Now after two years of reading, it's about time I let you know what I think is wrong with your mags (I know this won't be printed). 1st: There are always several misspelled words in every story.

2nd: Plenty of technical mistakes, i.e., A.S., June, 1942, "Gods of the Jungle," with the "vilyisha" came pains in the brains of the party of adventurers undergoing the weird treatment. This couldn't be possible because the cells of the brain are immune to feelings of any type.

3rd and most important: WE WANT TRIMMED EDGES.

Here're a couple of wants:

1st: F.A., June, '42: How about more Malcolm Smith on front covers and a sequel to "The Giant from Jupiter"?

2nd: A.S., May, '42: Give us more of the Space Hawk.

3rd: Plenty space stories.

4th: Plenty time stories.

5th: WE WANT TRIMMED EDGES.

J. A. HART,
Austin, Texas.

What about this, you readers who are doctors

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and professional men; can a brain cell feel pain? We were under the impression pressure on the brain caused intense pain and drove people insane.—Ed.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Mr. R.A.P.:

In your reply to the letter of Jim Thompson in the June issue of F.A. you asked the readers some questions (indirectly) which I would like to answer.

First. Try and get Krupa and "Mac" to do more illustrations even though they are in the army.

Second. Get Paul on the inside as well as on the back cover. Although I don't like all of Bok's work, some of it is better than average. Have at least one by Finlay every month. Have a lot more by Magarian (he sure is swell now), Fuqua, Hadley, and Smith. Oh yes, use more of St. John.

Third. In a previous letter to you I asked for more serials, I still hold to that. Have them running all the time. Keep them on the average of 70,000 words, but try and have some about 100,000 words. Looking over some back numbers of *Amazing Stories* I found that some serials that were run were shorter than your complete novels now.

Fourth. Don't run sequels in F.A. as they usually explain something unknown on the first story and that (to me) doesn't seem like fantasy.

Fifth. Have more ghost stories like "Spook for Yourself," and keep F.A. definitely on the super-fantasy type. Please don't let Wilcox overwork himself. AND KEEP THE FANTASY AND S.F. WRITERS OUT OF MAMMOTH DETECTIVE.

Sixth. PLEASE PUT ON TRIMMED EDGES. Have the interiors a whole page for every story, not spread all over.

Seventh. Enlarge the readers department in both magazines. Put in a book review department.

Eight. Keep your own department the way it is and give us more of next month's stories.

Ninth. I hear that A. Merritt is writing a new story. Try to get it.

If anything I have said is uncomplimentary I take it back, but I want to try to help to improve your mags.

WARD STUART,
30 Mill Road,
New Rochelle, N. Y.

We don't understand why we should keep these writers out of Mammoth Detective. You'll still get 'em here, and why deny detective story readers the excellence of their work?—Ed.

BETTER THAN FINLAY

Sirs:

At the age of 16 I feel I am old enough to

GLASSES THAT BARED THE SOUL
—REVEALING ALL FOUR FACES!

SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Fantastic ADVENTURES

These were the gift of the doomed Englishman fettered to the strange, red-headed young man. "Have some fun with these," the Englishman had said. . . . And Red saw not one face but FOUR belonging to everyone he observed. Thoughts were laid bare to him by the tell-tale faces. Secret souls were unmasked. Little did he realize that the cause of the Allies in Pacific islands would hinge on his ability to use these glasses. . . . Danger and excitement, fantasy and truth, blend perfectly to make a story you'll never forget. Don't miss this thrill-packed tale by Don Wilcox . . . one of the many great stories you'll want to read in the mammoth September FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JULY 17—RESERVE YOUR COPY NOW

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write a readable and sensible letter. I have written letters to this mag. before but never mailed them. This letter shall go through.

A small boy would stand and gape at beautiful paintings and long to produce beauty with his own hands. His enthusiasm was strong. He followed the line of art and is now in his teens. This boy was I. When I first started to read A.S. and F.A., the stories were a bit different. I soon noticed the inside illustrations. My gaze immediately swept to the signature "Magarian."

The name, Magarian, was not just the tops, but it produced a great piece of art in the way of impressionism. Their illustrations were enough to make me want to read the story adjoining. They added the spark to a good story. Magarian could do a lot of Burroughs' long stories. They have produced some of the most beautiful treasures of art in other magazines. Magarian was my inspiration!

The nerve of some people insinuating this newcomer, Virgil Finlay, is better than Magarian—or—a writer when speaking of Magarian said, "He reminds me of Finlay." Finlay has done some nice work on covers of a certain mag. but certainly does not know the real art of impressionism. When Magarian gets started, some of these others will look rather small. . . .

ROLAND BERNS,
1520 S. Karlov,
Chicago, Ill.

We thank Magarian for winning you over to us!—Ed.

ZERO

Sirs:

One editor has seen fit to print my first try at writing to stf mags, so here I go trying you.

The cover is first: It is fair, but does not seem at all the type for your mag. If Smith can't do better, and you have to print women on the cover, let Mac do 'em, or revert back to the good covers you used when you first got started.

David V. Reed takes first place for me with a story that *is* a fantasy, even though it is lightly written. Bloch's "Gather 'Round the Flowing Bowler" takes second place, and "Return of Joan of Arc" third. Your shorts seem to be the only ones that are good fantasy. "Holy City of Mars," Daughter of the Snake God," and "Secret of the Golden Jaguar" are little more than adventure tales and could possibly have sold to that type of magazine. The story by Wilcox was pretty well written, but just did not have enough to work on. "Mr. Pym Makes a Deal" makes enjoyable reading. I wish you would go in for more stuff like "The Magic Flute," "The Liquid Man," and "The Man from Hell." These are the stories which were meant for this magazine, and the magazine should be made and kept for fantasy.

(Continued on page 236)

DEATH LURKED IN THE SUB-SAHARA!

There lay the Earth-Star, most precious of jewels, about to be sold to a ruler who would exploit his people to pay for it; about to be sold by a government that would use the proceeds to wage war. . . . Suddenly, out of the darkness came a masked figure. The Earth-Star was stolen!

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AUGUST ISSUE

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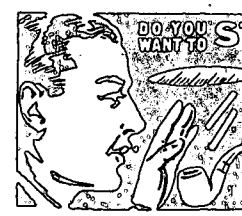

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CITY..... STATE.....

(Continued from page 234)

Your notebook is always pretty interesting, but use less space in bragging, and devote it to giving the reader a better type of fantasy. The reader's column is nearly always the same: a bunch of letters which praise you to the sky, and one stuck in on a dare which gives you what you deserve, a lambasting for thinking that what the reader wants is just a fancy, and that you know what he does want.

I believe that you are depending for sales on the fact that most of the public does not want to think on what it reads. Apparently you are getting the sales from this theory. If they are not to think, then, why not give them some good pics to look at? This issue starts off on a fair pic by Hadley, and then slaps us in the face with Fuqua's lousy adventure stuff on pages 54-55, 193, and 202-203. You are perhaps justified in bragging on Magarian with three beautiful pics in this issue, but Fuqua more than balances that good work. Sewell's pics are also nothing but adventure drawings and Jones for "Joan" dashed off some scribbling which is certainly not art. Jay Jackson stinks; I do not remember a good pic by him yet.

By now, I suppose you think I have no love for the mag. It is not that. In my first letter, I am just letting off steam that has gathered over the months. You do put out good stories and good art work, but I think that you can judge better by complaints than praises. Things that are not complained about can be assumed as satisfactory, but things that are not praised cannot. Many readers do not complain about certain points, and you might get the idea that they are satisfied. The thing to do is to make improvements on the complaints and let the praised *or ignored* things go on the way they are. I do not know how you put out as much as you do for the money unless you reach a large audience, so I may be just spouting about something that will have no effect, but I close with the hope that we will soon see an elimination of poor art, the return of better covers, and some real fantasy stuff like that which appeared in earlier issues.

ZERO.

You are wrong on one thing, that we consider the reader's opinion as only "fancy" and put in what we ourselves want to run. We think the proof that we do give the readers what they want is in the very fact that they read us faithfully in great numbers.—Ed.

A CLASSIC

Sirs:

I'll take the girl on the May cover over a Mac Girl any time. Ditto Magarian's lovely "Madeline."

Speaking of the "Mademoiselle," why didn't you play her up? That was the best story in the issue; it was the best story you've ever printed. It set Don Wilcox right alongside the masters. But you just let it slip by. Another yarn by Wilcox, the kids'll eat it up, ho-hum. . . . Yeh,

(Continued on page 239)

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VULCAN—
God of Heavy Industry

by HENRY GADE

The Roman God of devouring flame, who masquerades as a smith and forges weapons for the Olympians

IF we are to believe the legends about him, Vulcan is a fake. He purports to be the god of smiths, the deity of the sword and plowshare, quite respectable, and a decent citizen of Olympus. But actually, it is doubtful if he, like Hephaestus, is any deity of the smith at all, but has merely stolen from that god his characteristics as a mask to his true nature.

According to Virgil's Aeneid (5. 662), Vulcan is the god of devouring flame. His official title is Volcanus, according to the Romans. He is their god of fire.

Perhaps the most noted place on Earth that can be associated with his name is a place in the Comitium called "area Volcani" which was also called "Volcanal." At this place, on August 23, the Flamen Volcanalis sacrificed, and the heads of Roman families threw small fish, which the Tiber fishermen sold on the spot, into the fire in a strange rite.

The popular conception of the name Vulcan being a derivative of volcano, is probably completely unfounded, since nowhere is Vulcan associated with the eruptions of a volcano. The word is a direct derivative of the Roman word for fire. And his association is always with an unnatural fire, not that of nature.

Vulcan also had a surname, Mulciber, which was a contradiction of his more familiar name, since it meant that he had power to allay conflagrations, to put out fires.

In historical times, Vulcan's association with conflagrations becomes apparent. For instance, when Augustus organized the city to check fires, he designated areas known as *regiones* and *vici*. By this method a careful check was kept, and the danger from fires alleviated.

The *magistri victorum*, officers of these administrative districts, worshipped Vulcan as *Volcanus quietus augustus*. On August 23 they also sacrificed to him, together with Ops Opifera and the Nymphae, which suggests the need of water in quenching the flames.

The cult of Vulcan also became very famous at Ostia, where most of the corn of the Roman population was stored. Safety from fire was very vital at this place, because it fed the Romans.

Since Vulcan is most consistently associated with the forging of swords, it must be logical, that at some time in history, someone associated with fire created a weapon of this type which became very famous and valuable. It was a secret that, like the builder of a better mousetrap today, would bring many people to his door.

Perhaps we can safely say that Vulcan, from time immemorial, was a mythical figure blamed for all terrible fires, such as forest fires (caused by a flaming sword—of lightning—from the sky); fires which destroyed cities, etc. Thus he became the god of devouring flame.

Then when the theft of the reputation of Hephaestus occurred, it seems evident that it was the work of this mysterious smith who became known as a "god" of flame and steel (and therefore of industry) because of his flaming forge, but who disliked the cognomen of Vulcan because of the fear and hate it instilled because of his flaming deeds of death and destruction.

Later, when Augustus developed his system of fire prevention, his disguise became even more complete, and perhaps it was Augustus himself who gave him the name of Mulciber. The order to sacrifice to Ops Opifera and the Nymphae at the same rites with Vulcan is an obvious effort to tie him up with water and the quenching of flame. This must have been necessary to allay the superstitions of the people over his acts designed to control fire, which to them was a diety, and not to be tampered with, much less controlled, lest he devour them in anger.

The legend surrounding smiths, relating to their bravery, only becomes understandable when we associate him with this desperate fear of fire, since it took a brave man to turn fire to his own use, and forge a sword in its fiery heart. Thus we can easily understand how the first smith became a god, and a god he didn't desire to be at all. The natural result was the adoption of a disguise.

Therefore, we can say that Vulcan, the god of heavy industry, as we know him today, once was a man, and not a god born of myth.

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(Continued from page 236)

that's about it—you couldn't see what was written all over that story. "Mademoiselle Butterfly:" classic. A great classic, brother, in your language and mine.

If you're lucky enough to get another "Mlle. Butterfly," don't by-pass it with a yawn and a mediocre blurb. Classics, as if you didn't know, walk hand-in-hand with General MacArthurs.

KENNETH L. HARRISON,
1812 Southeast 48th Ave.,
Portland, Ore.

Ok boy, will Don Wilcox like you!—Ed.

RATINGS

Sirs:

Well, here's that man again. I'll start off this gem of correspondence with the rating of the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. (Asterisk system, six the highest.)

The Giant from Jupiter****. Very good for newcomers.

Cupid Takes a Holiday******. Farnsworth, yum, yum.

The Sun Doom****. Plot was a bit ancient.

Mr. Hibbard's Magic Hat***. Not very good fantasy, but a nicely worked out story.

Battle of Manetong****. McGivern's always good.

The Incredible Mr. Kismit****. Ditto O'Brien.

The Pied Piper Fights the gestapo (No capital) **. Worst of the "Feep" yarns, but—passable.

The Skin Deep Beauty******. Gad! I'm surprised, a new author getting six stars, and Coblentz getting three. Tut, tut.

Tink Takes a Fling******. Ah ha! Holding out on us poor fans.

The Quest in Time****** (etc., etc.). But then you're not surprised, you knew that everyone would love Hamilton's masterpiece.

The Man Who Turned to Smoke***½. Pretty thin.

Cassius Siddle's Great Illusion******. Old plot if ever there was one, but worked out as if by a master. Yale Kenny, pfoo Wellman, no less.

Ebbtide Jones on the Warpath******. A good American story.

Articles*****. Less of the articles, more of the stories.

Now for my letter!!

What in &*œ$ happened to "Meet the Author"? You taunting jackals, you peeve me.

That cover was Smith's worst. The right leg of the giant was way out of proportion. (Yes, I can criticize, being artistically inclined myself.) We fans will never forget the May cover. Ah joy. Now then for the interiors. That pic for "Cupid Takes a Holiday" was in the "Poster" class, and whoever in THE SWAN STUDIO drew it doesn't know a darn thing about sf. Gordon stinks. Magarian has already emulated Finlay and if they keep up they will surpass the master. Do you honestly think Finlay could draw a better pic for Cassius Siddle's Great Illusion? Or for Tink Takes a Fling? Jackson is steadily im-

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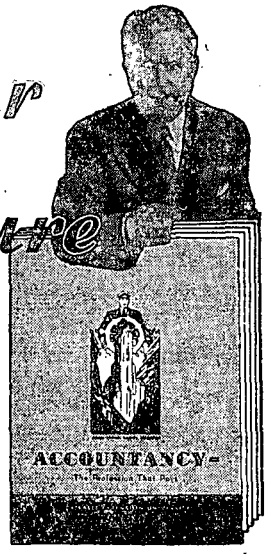

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proving, that pic of his for O'Brien's short was actually good. Maybe you better turnabout and keep 'im. Joe Sewell is swell. Get Bok and the adored Wesso. Yer cartoons are gradually petering out. Why don't you get Clyne back to work for you? He was by far the most talented cartoonist you ever had, and he drew like a professional. Now you understand that just because he's my personal friend doesn't mean that—whoops, but I mean every word I said.

Nertz to that Jim Thompson and the insufferable stinker, Harry Shuster. "Boot the poorly drawn female off the cover," yes, that's what he said. "Poorly drawn female," the Mac girl, a poorly drawn female. I bet those two guys are so dumb they try to get jobs as floorwalkers in telephone booths. Again nertz to 'em. And by the way, why doesn't Jackson try on a cover? He might show his true colors, as did Bob Fuqua, who is bad on interiors and the best artist you ever had on covers. To wind it up I'll tell the best story you have ever printed. The outstanding, wonderful, superb, "The Little People."

CHARLES NUTT,
3025 Ainslie St.,
Chicago, Ill.

We could hardly add any comment to this letter, could we?—Ed.

"QUEST IN TIME" TOPS

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, along with *Amazing Stories* for well nigh on a year now, I don't mind telling you that you're the best on the market, without any exceptions.

In regards to the June issue of F.A.

"The Quest in Time" was one of the best stories in months. Hamilton is tops on my list.

"The Giant from Jupiter" was a disappointment. *(Concluded on page 242)*

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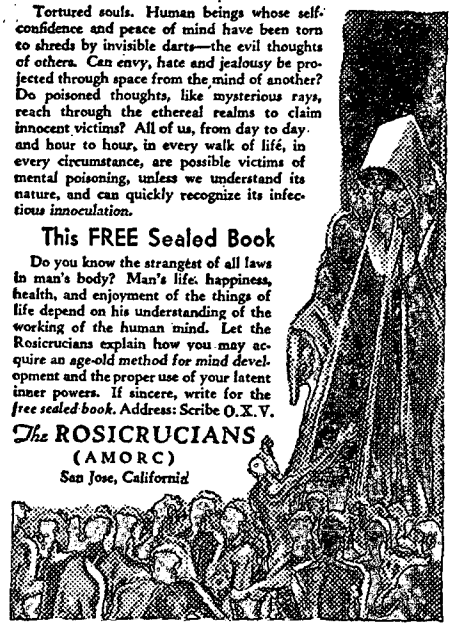

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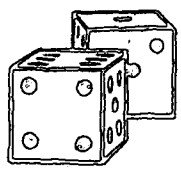

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(Concluded from page 240)

Farnsworth did a good job on "Cupid Takes a Holiday."

"The Incredible Mr. Kismet" disappears with 4th place.

"The Sun Doom" was last.

I got a kick out of "Mr. Hibbard's Magic Hat," as I do out of all shorts. Oh, don't get me wrong, I like novels and serials too, but those shorts carry a pack, and a thrill.

I shore will miss that "Mac Girl" but Malcolm Smith will do on the cover for the duration.

Sincerely,
FRANK MURPHY,
452—68th Street,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Hamilton will appear regularly in our pages, we assure you.—Ed.

SUPPORTS BURROUGHS

Sirs:

What I read in your last F.A. magazine really made my blood boil and that is the reason you are receiving this letter.

The fellow, that wrote this particular article I am referring to, is probably one in a million, but I believe he sure needs to be told off. The person I am speaking of is the boy from Crothersville, Indiana, Lynn H. Benham.

I really get hot under the collar when somebody says anything against Burroughs. Most of the F.A. fans would probably feel the same way I do. I think Burroughs is one of the very best authors you have and will continue to think so in spite of outside contention. Ahem . . . meaning, Benham. Just keep Burroughs on the firing line and I'll be one fan that you will never lose.

Get some more Mars stories by Farley. His story in the May F.A. was superb. The cover by Smith. . . . Whew, keep it up, he really has the touch of a master.

Hereafter, let's keep men like Benham off the reader's page. If he don't like Burroughs he's not worth the paper his name could be written on.

LEROY W. HEDIN,
49 Layton Avenue,
Salt Lake City, Utah.

P.S. Ed.: If you get any more Burroughs complaints, let me handle them.

We sure will!—Ed.

WRONG GAS?

Sirs:

Enjoy reading the FANTASTIC ADVENTURES very much; however, "Gas Attack," the article by Ellis White, is not quite correct. In the March issue, the tenth paragraph, he writes that mustard gas —the worst possible form of chemical warfare— has not been surpassed by anything deadlier. He probably has forgotten about Lewisite, which is a highly toxic arsenic gas. This gas, *like* mustard, when in contact with the skin causes blisters; *however, unlike* mustard, the fluid contained within the blister is toxic itself. A gas mask is *not* protection against these gases (mustard and lewisite). It may and does cause death even when the mask is worn, if the fumes or liquid come in contact with the skin. To step on contaminated ground wearing shoes and rubbers, is still not protection against these two gases.

Germany has thousands of tons of mustard gas stored.

Japan has been using a 50% solution of mustard and lewisite against the Chinese.

So far Germany has no need to use gas; however that doesn't mean that she isn't going to use it, and I'm sure when the going gets tough, she'll use it.

Then paragraph twelve. Ellis White claims that it has been proved that in the last war, peasants were able to protect themselves from mustard gas by merely closing the doors and windows of their cottages until the attack was over. If you don't mind, I'd like that proof. Mustard gas is a persistent gas and lingers from one to three weeks. I would say that this is impossible. Weather has no effect on mustard except cold weather which freezes it, but once it gets warm, *again* the gas is again effective.

Then the next paragraph. Decontamination squads are to us suicide squads, as one man out of every ten is a casualty. Furthermore it costs more to decontaminate an area than it does to contaminate one.

I don't see why you didn't get someone who knows something about gas.

Remember, you'll never know that gas is there unless you can smell it. If you should smell mustard or garlic, geraniums, new cut corn or hay, a sweet smell or a flypaper odor—that, my friend, that smell, is what gas smells like.

Trusting that you will not again have articles printed which may misinform the public.

SERGEANT HENRY W. BARON,
Btry. "G," 202 C.A. (AA),
A.P.O. 309,
Fort Lewis, Wash.

According to James Kendall, D.Sc., F.R.S., Professor of Chemistry, University of Edinburgh; formerly Liaison Officer with Allied Services on Chemical Warfare, "Even if it were discovered, a chemical much more toxic than mustard would be too dangerous to manufacture on a large scale." Apparently a more toxic gas has not been discovered. Who is right?—Ed.

SPOOKS AND BATTLESHIPS

Sirs:

I read a story in the January edition of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It was "Spook for Yourself." The spooks said that they were 100% for national defense so they were wearing shorter gowns. But they continued to rattle chains. Why didn't they give their chains to help build a battleship?

JAMES E. MASTERS, JR.,
U. S. Naval Unit HECP,
Lewes, Delaware.

We are happy to inform you that the spooks have given up their chains to national defense. We haven't heard a chain rattle in months!—Ed.

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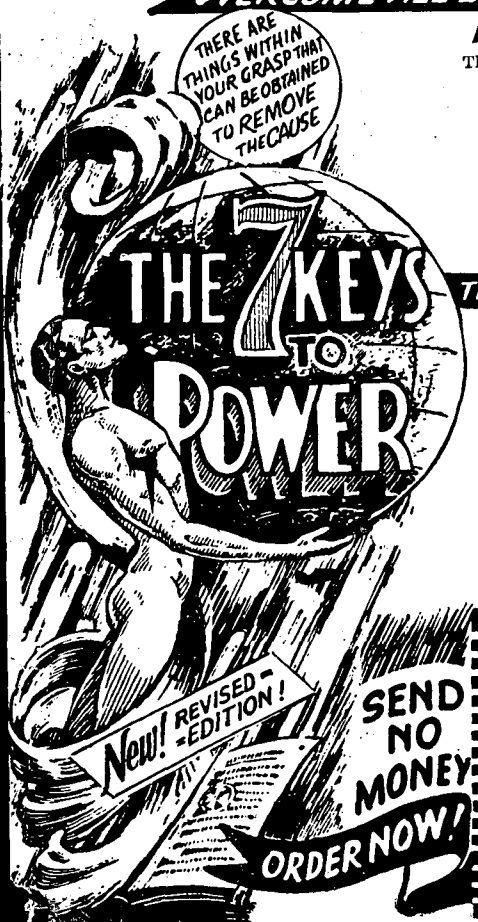

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Legend tells of his forge in the sky, and of magic swords and plowshares that are made on it. Is it legend of god or man? (See page 238 for details)

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